

The Man Who Killed Oswald

Despite the low quality of talent that he employed in his scruffy striptease emporium on Dallas' Commerce Street, Jack Ruby claimed—often and loud—that he loved "class."

At the moment that the President of the U.S. was gunned down, Ruby, a fleshy, balding bachelor of 52, was sitting at a desk in the display advertising department of the Dallas Morning News working on an advertisement designed to promote the outstanding virtues of his droop-bosomed Carousel Club strippers. Someone came in with the news of the assassination.

Ruby seemed incredulous. He went into another office to watch television, then went back to his ad copy. Finally he returned to his club and wrote the word CLOSED across the front of his billboards outside. This was the only "classy" thing to do. "I couldn't forget that Communists had sent Oswald to kill our President," he said later. "I couldn't forget how Jackie had suffered and that Caroline and John wouldn't have a daddy any more."

So Jack Ruby took his gun and killed Oswald—and, as it was with Oswald's own crime, the U.S. was still trying to figure out why.

"Sparky." One of eight children of Russian and Polish immigrants, Jack Rubenstein was born and raised in the "Bloody 20th" ward of Chicago's West Side, never finished high school. He liked to think that he had connections with racketeers—the classy kind. He affected the sharp dress of the big-time mobsters, the white-on-white shirts and ties, pearl-grey hats, phony diamond pinkie ring. He dropped hoodlum names like dandruff.

But the big-timers never even knew he existed. He was a "novelty salesman," a euphemism for a dollar-grubber who would sell virtually anything, even if it was a little hot. He peddled cigars, janitorial supplies, calendars, and, says his brother Hyman by way of explaining Jack's innate patriotism, "things like statues of General MacArthur and others of national interest."

Then for a while Jack turned organizer for the racketeer-infested Waste Material Handlers Union. Accounts differ. Some say he got out of line and was beaten by mobsters; others say the cop banged him over the head. In any event his union career was short-lived. He was admitted to the Army Air Force during World War II, served three inconspicuous years, came out a pfc. and returned to whatever buck-producing activity he could find. For a while he scalped tickets for sporting events, boxed for a short time under the name of "Sparkling Ruby." His friends still call him "Sparky."

"A Real Guy." Like his three brothers, Jack legally changed his surname to Ruby. In 1949 he went to Dallas to help out a sister who was running a two-bit nightclub. He played bartender for a while and then took over manage-

ment of the Carousel. He clung to newsmen like a leech, begging often for free publicity.

Ruby had a revolver, since he always carried—or claimed that he carried—a big roll of cash. He was picked up twice for carrying a concealed weapon, and occasionally for violation of state liquor laws and of the city dance-hall ordinances. But Ruby was a real cop buff—he was always hanging around headquarters, and so became a familiar figure. Aside from all that, Ruby was a health nut. He was worried about his falling hair and sought the services of Dallas Trichologist Bruce McLean. "I've known him well since 1958," says McLean. "He's excitable. He was a bit inconsistent and unpredictable. For some time he's been going to health clubs. He called me and asked me if sweat hurt his hair. I said no, not if he washed it out. He has black hair, quite thin. There are two areas on his head which are beyond help—and I told him so."

After Kennedy's assassination, Ruby kept calling various family members in (according to them) progressive stages of emotional disarray. And in keeping with his longtime pattern, he stuck around police headquarters, even hustling sandwiches and coffee for the newsmen who were swarming about. In a way he became a recognizable but unrecognized part of the interior decoration.

The Transfer. On Sunday morning, Nov. 24, Jack Ruby got up early, took his regular morning swim (wearing a bathing cap to prevent further baldness) in the pool at his apartment house, then headed for police headquarters. Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry, mostly bowing to the demands of television crewmen that they be allowed to set up their cameras in time to see anything and everything that might happen to Oswald, had inanely announced that Oswald would be transferred at 10 a.m. to the county jail. The publicized plan called for moving Oswald in an armored car from the basement garage at headquarters. This was a subterfuge, for Curry really intended to use the armored vehicle as a decoy, spiriting Oswald away in an unmarked police car. The police checked the garage area and the anteroom through which Oswald would be escorted. Parked cars were examined, and everybody was shoed out of the garage. Then police admitted dozens of newsmen, screening them carefully.

They were not careful enough. Somehow, presumably because he had become such a familiar part of the scenery, Jack Ruby succeeded in slipping in with the newsmen. At about 11 a.m. a knot of detectives and uniformed cops took Oswald out of his carefully guarded security cell on the fifth floor. His hands were manacled, and for extra safety Homicide Detective James Leavelle handcuffed himself to Oswald. "If anybody shoots at you," said Leavelle, "I hope that they are as good

as you are." Oswald "kind of laughed." Said he, "Nobody is going to shoot at me."

"Jack!" Down in the elevator and into the garage came Oswald and his guards, heading for the armored car. Somebody shouted, "Here they come!" Newsreel cameras whirred. Live TV cameras watched the action and flashed the scene instantaneously across the nation's television sets. Precisely twelve seconds after Oswald appeared, Ruby ducked out from his position among the newsmen. A detective saw him, recognized him. "Jack!" he cried. "You crazy son of a bitch!" As the cop spoke, Ruby pointed his .38-cal. revolver at



RUBY & CAROUSEL SHOWGIRLS
He begged for publicity.

Oswald and fired one shot. Oswald died 100 minutes later at Parkland General Hospital.

Indicted by a Dallas County Grand Jury for murder with malice, Ruby could get a death sentence. But his lawyer said he would plead temporary insanity—and if the jury agreed with that plea, Ruby could get off scot-free.

"That Soul Is Stout"

Dallas in particular, Texas in general, and the U.S. as a whole was in an agony of self-reproach. Somehow the conflicts of political and sociological difference, which are always bitter and are historically endowed with passion, had been translated into something unique to this day and age—a climate in which, and only in which, the assassination of President Kennedy could have occurred.

In his Thanksgiving message President Johnson made a great point of it, urged U.S. citizens "to close down the poison springs of hatred and intolerance and fanaticism." Texas' Governor John Connally, still in bed, said: "I think we all must suffer for a lack of tolerance, lack of understanding, the passion, the prejudice, the hate and the bigotry which permeates the whole society in which we live and which manifested itself here on Friday."

Cried New Mexico's Democratic Governor Jack M. Campbell: "I hope this takes some of the malice out of people and makes them realize that it is

possible to disagree without being disagreeable or hateful." Judge Roy Mayhall, chairman of Alabama's Democratic Party, said; "America has been on a drunken spree of hate, and we in Alabama share the blame." Former Vice President Richard M. Nixon pleaded with U.S. citizens to "pledge ourselves to fight this tendency of hatred and violence." And Dr. James R. Allen, a Baptist minister in Dallas, said from his Thanksgiving Day pulpit that Kennedy's death was triggered by just one "element in our city" but that the "white heat of a hate-filled atmosphere allowed the necessary warmth for this element to crawl out from under the rocks to be seen."

"Not a Flaw." In the emotion of the moment, such hair-shirtism was inevitable. But it would be as wrong to accuse a whole people or a nation of such extremism as it would be to argue for hatred. And perhaps it remained for Kentucky Republican Thruston Morton, rising in the U.S. Senate, to best place it all within context: "It was not a flaw in the American system or the American character that struck down John Kennedy. It was not the sin of a city or of its citizens. It was not a tragedy that struck from some dark stain of violence on the American system or in the American soul. And we do not serve the best interests of our nation, or of the memory of a murdered President, by letting wrongly placed recriminations overcome the good sense of this great nation."

The man who shot John Kennedy was a "stranger to the American heritage," said Morton, and his "mind had been warped by an alien violence, not by a native condition."

"Let us mourn the terrible event," cried Morton, "but let us not mourn for the American soul—for that soul is stout and lighted by truth and faith. Let the blame be on him who actually committed the crime . . . What happened was not America's fault. Only the sober realization of that can make our mourning meaningful and not torture it with a guilt that is undeserved and unworthy of the cause in which our Presidents live and for which sometimes they tragically die."

"I Reject It." As Morton sat down, Tennessee Democrat Albert Gore sprang to his feet, praised him for his speech, then seconded it in powerful words: "I accept no blame for what this demented man did. I feel no sense of personal guilt. He is the one who had become a fanatic. Why should all America be blamed for the actions of one fanatic? True, our society has many problems and imperfections, much stress and distress, hate, fear and disappointment; but it is an injustice to our millions of people of good will, even the teeming thousands of hospitable, cheering people in Dallas, to charge them with murderous guilt."

"I reject it for myself and for my people," said Gore. "This was an act of a madman,"

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