

DALLAS: Dallas-92. A JI dirw has

Late Casualty

"I sometimes wake up thinking about that mess," says Jesse E. Curry. "Kennedy, Oswald and Ruby. Sometimes I can't get back to sleep." Curry, a bespectacled, almost chubby 52, has more reason for insomnia over the assassination and its aftermath than most people. He was chief of the Dallas police force at the time, and overnight he went from a nationally prominent hero whose officers had captured the President's assassin in less than 90 minutes, to chief scapegoat for Lee Harvey Oswald's own violent death at Dallas police headquarters. "Jack Ruby is the worst thing that ever happened to us," he would shake his head and say afterward.

"That Oswald thing took it all out of the chief," one of his officers observed recently. "I've never seen a man suffer and suffer so much about one thing. Hell, he didn't kill Oswald. He thought he was doing the right thing." Curry himself also thought he had been doing the right thing when he granted news interviews during Oswald's interrogations, and he bridled at the Warren commission's criticism of him for that. "A major consequence of the hasty, and at times incorrect divulgence of evidence after the assassination," said the commission's report, "was simply to give rise to groundless rumors and public confusion." A steady volley of critical letters for more than a year after the assassination kept needling the normally composed chief about those black November days.

Quotas: Gradually, his blood pressure began to rise, and his hand on the police force, according to one top cop, began to weaken. In January last year, a city council committee noted that the Dallas police force wrote more traffic tickets than any other Texas force and charged that more time was being spent "getting your quota" than attending to more serious police work.

Last week, three days after the city council contracted the International Association of Chiefs of Police to do a full-scale audit of his police department,

Chief Curry announced that he had resigned for medical reasons. But a high ranking subordinate offered another explanation: "He had to go. We've lost too much discipline around here. We've got to get that spirit back."