

IMPACT

JUNE
35¢

OSWALD, RUBY AND

IMPACT
June '64

By Ike Pappas

THE LAST public words Lee Harvey Oswald spoke to anyone, he spoke to me:

"I'd like to see a representative of the American Civil Liberties Union," he said.

He never got his wish. Moments later a bullet ripped through his body, fatally wounding him.

It was 11:17 A.M. on Sunday, November 24, 1963. The sun was bright over Dallas. But there was no cheer, no Sabbath feeling of renewal. Only a day and a half earlier, the President of the United States had been murdered on these same streets.

I moved along those sad streets that morning, among these people, covering the tragedy for Radio Station WNEW in New York City. I had a date to keep with an accused murderer whose name was known throughout the world—Lee Harvey Oswald. And, also, a date with a man I'd met before, Jack Ruby.

The date was made by Dallas Chief of



As Oswald emerged from the elevator, somebody said, "Here he is, here he is."



A black blur ran forward, passing me so fast I didn't know what or who it was.

ME!

I was caught in the middle as Jack Ruby burst past me to shoot down President Kennedy's accused killer



Oswald passed directly in front of me. "Do you have anything to say?" I asked.



He looked at me wildly. His lips began to move, to try to say something.



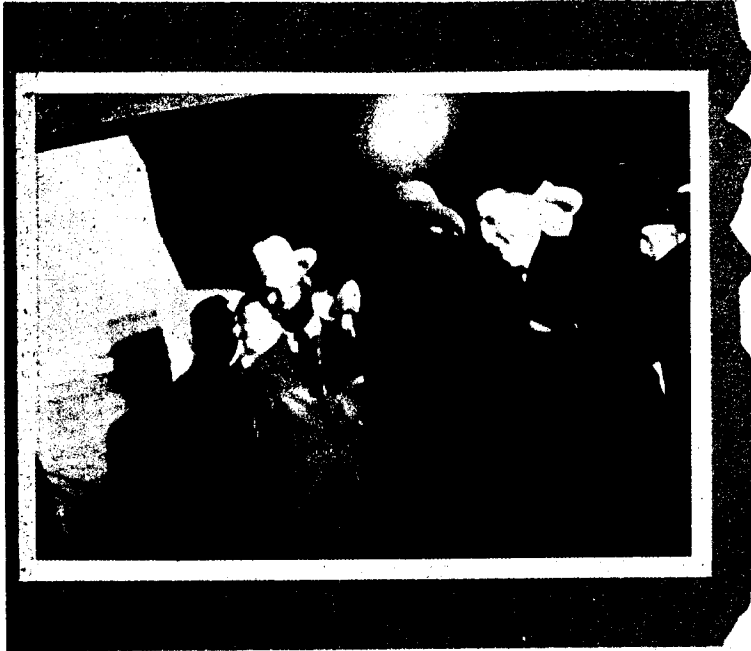
"Jack," a Dallas cop yelled, "you son of a bitch!" But Jack Ruby rushed on.



Oswald was looking straight ahead. Ruby jammed the gun into his sweater.

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There was a bang. I remember the flash of the gun against Oswald's sweater.



In the last second, Oswald looked as if he were trying to push the gun away.

Police Jess E. Curry the night before, in a corridor of the Dallas police headquarters that was littered with cigarette butts, candy wrappers, used flash bulbs and paper.

"I have an announcement to make," said Curry as he walked up the long corridor from his office. The 200 reporters, cameramen, radio and TV commentators and technicians who had squeezed into that corridor 30 hours earlier stopped what they were doing and listened. Curry continued:

"We plan to transfer this man *not* tonight. If you men will be here by no later than ten o'clock in the morning, why, that will be early enough. Captain Fritz says he's finished with him, unless some witness shows up that we need to bring him out for a showing. I don't believe there'll be any more questioning tonight. He will be taken to the county jail and turned over to the sheriff."

"Tonight or tomorrow?" asked a reporter.

"Tomorrow," Curry replied.

"After ten o'clock?" came another question.

"Well," came Curry's answer, "It wouldn't be any later than ten."

This was impossible, I thought. They'll never stick to that plan. They would never announce it, if they intended to move Oswald. You just don't do that. One veteran reporter said, "They'll move him about three o'clock in the morning. They'll probably put him in a lead box with two air holes cut in it and carry him out with a 20-man escort all toting machine guns."

But Chief Curry kept his word. Oswald was indeed there, at the city jail, when we all showed up in the morning just before 10 o'clock. What we hadn't figured on was the incredible pattern of the two days before. A reporter never admits to anyone, especially himself, that he's getting too much cooperation. But this seemed to be the case.

When I arrived at the Dallas police headquarters on Friday night, a few hours after the assassination, I was passed into the third-floor nerve center of the investigation by a captain who took a quick look at my New York City press badge.

I was surprised and pleased. That was easy enough.

The long corridor leading to the door marked "Homicide and Robbery," behind which Oswald was being interrogated, had been virtually taken over and turned into a combination TV studio and press room. Two motorcycle policemen stood at "parade rest" in front of the door, to keep the entrance clear, but from that point, all the way to the beginning of the corridor, it was jammed with eager men, each clutching some piece of equipment—a camera, a typewriter, a tape recorder.

Fat TV cables were taped to the marbled floor of the corridor. They ran past the bank of elevators and through the double doors marked Chief of Police. There was another TV camera placed right in the reception room leading to the chief's office. A woman reporter from a local paper sat munching a sandwich and making notes. Another reporter cursed the battery of his transistor radio, which suddenly had gone dead. Photographers popped their cameras at anyone who walked down the corridor.

Then came the next incredible occurrence of that long Friday night—Oswald was to be presented to the press.

The door of the homicide office opened and out stepped Chief Curry and Dallas District Attorney Henry Wade, a soft-spoken man with curly white hair and an easy drawl.

"Everyone down to the lineup room," he said.

No one knew what was coming. We hoped and expected it to be a press briefing by Curry and Wade.

The stairwell of the Dallas City Hall rumbled and trembled with the rush of feet as we dashed down four flights of stairs to the basement, where the lineup room was located.

Reporters stood on every available chair and table. A mass of eager faces looked toward the door as Wade and Curry struggled in. It was hot. The shouting continued until Curry spoke up:

"Now listen!" he shouted. The room quieted, and he continued: "We do not want anyone to rush up here. If we have that, we will take the

man out of here immediately, and you will not have another opportunity to see him."

Someone over my left shoulder whispered: "Jesus, they're not going to bring him into this mess, are they?"

They were. We were about to be shown the most notorious prisoner in the history of this country.

I moved alongside D.A. Wade and asked him: "Are you going to put him up on the stage?"

"No," said Wade, "we'll bring him right in here." He pointed to a spot directly in front of the stage.

"Why do you want everyone back?" was my next question and Wade, with his answer, put

THE
Carousel
Club
1312 1/2 Commerce Dallas Texas
RJ 7-2387
Continuous Show
Glamorous Girls
Open To
2 AM
nightly
your host... Jack Ruby

Jack Ruby's card: "Why don't you come over for a drink?" he begged author.

his finger on the reason for all the surprises: "You got a hundred people out here. Nobody knows who they are. We're used to dealing with four or five members of the press . . . not a hundred."

Wade, although he didn't realize it then, had summed up the whole police situation in Dallas that weekend. The officials simply were not used to handling the world press. Out of innocence, they acted naively. The press, for its part, did not say a word.

Suddenly, there was a commotion at the doorway. Lee Harvey Oswald, handcuffed and looking straight ahead of him, walked into the lineup room escorted by a dozen detectives wearing the Texas trademark—a ten-gallon hat.

Oswald stopped at the spot Wade and Curry

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(CONT'D)

cleared for him. He appeared remarkably calm. His face was frozen in a half smile, half frown. It glistened in the TV lights. He needed a shave. He wore a brown jacket and underneath it, a soiled T-shirt. His right eye was swollen and bruised from the fight with police when he was captured in a Dallas movie theater.

Oswald's eyes darted around at all the faces. Everyone was quiet now. In the sudden stillness, the whirr of the movie cameras and the *click, click, pop* of the still cameras were magnified a hundredfold. The reporters pressed forward. Twenty microphones were flung into Oswald's face. He began to speak in a controlled, low voice:

"I really don't know what the situation is, other than that I have been accused of killing a policeman. I know nothing more than that. I'm waiting for someone to come forward to give me legal assistance."

Someone yelled: "Did you kill the President?" Oswald showed no emotion. "I have not been charged with that," he replied calmly. "The first thing I heard about it was when the reporters in the hallway asked me that question."

Oswald began to say something else, but a detective yanked his arm and the other detectives began to move back out of the door.

The prisoner was taken upstairs, to the fourth-floor jail, to be formally charged with the murder of the President.

At that moment I was standing in a large police reception area. A nattily dressed man, short, with a thick stubble on his face, came over to me. He wore a dark grey, well-pressed suit and a fedora. I thought he was a detective, for he seemed to know many people in the reception area.

"You a reporter?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, cautiously.

"Where you from?" He pressed in a little closer.

"New York," I said.

His eyes lit up.

"How long you gonna be in town?"
"I don't know," I replied. "Just as long as it takes to do this story."
He reached into his pocket and produced a business card.
"Why don't you come over for a drink?" he asked. "We've got a nice show, lots of girls."
I glanced at the card.

to move him."

Question: "Why an armored truck?"

Curry: "Well, it's just common sense. We've been in the business a long time. If someone's going to try to do something you try to keep him from it. Our squad cars are not bulletproof, you know."

Question: "Have there been any threats against Oswald's life?"

Curry: "Yes, but I don't know how many."

Question: "Do you consider these serious threats or just crank calls?"

Curry: "I wouldn't be able to judge that. I don't know how serious they are."

Dallas was jumpy that morning. It wasn't anything you could see or touch, but you felt it. People in cars kept driving around the City Hall. There was grim talk of mob violence against Oswald. Violence was in the air.

Someone, over by the window of the chief's office, yelled: "There's an armored truck down there." The truck was trying to squeeze into the garage, but it was a tight fit and the vehicle remained half in and

half out of the building.

Curry concluded his press conference. It was time to transfer the prisoner. The press began to drift from Curry's office toward the basement, to the garage, to await Oswald's exit.

There were three of us left on the third floor when the door marked Robbery and Homicide opened. Out stepped Homicide Chief Will Fritz, followed by the hand-cuffed Oswald and a score of detectives.

Oswald seemed cleaner. Someone had brought him some clothes. He had changed from the brown shirt jacket and the soiled T-shirt to a white sports shirt and a black sweater. He looked clean-shaven.

I walked over to the prisoner. Oswald paused by the microphone. Then he stared me in the face. His face had that same sickly smirk on it. As he turned, he spoke those last 12 public words of

his life: "I'd like to see a representative of the American Civil Liberties Union."

A moment later, he was pushed into a side door off the corridor. Inside the doorway was the special elevator to the basement, leading to the waiting armored truck, to the cameras, to the shouting reporters.

Detectives squeezed into the special elevator all around Oswald. The elevator doors closed.

I ran down the four flights of stairs to the basement, beating Oswald and the detectives out of the doorway to the garage by about a minute.

The elevator reached the basement. As Oswald came out of the door, someone muttered: "Here he is, here he is."

Oswald passed directly in front of me. I leaned out and asked him: "Do you have anything to say in your defense?" He looked at me wildly. He

seemed to recognize me.

His lips began to move, to try to say something, but he made no sound. It seemed as if he were trying to smile and pout at the same time.

Off to my left, just a few feet away as Oswald passed, stood Ruby.

As Oswald turned his face from me, he looked directly ahead. I am convinced that Oswald himself first saw his killer coming.

I glanced to my left. A black-garbed mass ran forward, crouched low, moving so swiftly we didn't know what it was or who it was.

A detective knew who it was, though. "Jack," he yelled, "you son of a bitch!"

But Ruby was not to be stopped. Oswald looked into Ruby's face. Oswald's mouth sagged. The gun jammed in close to Oswald's black sweater.

There was a loud bang. Oswald, in the last second, looked as if he were trying to push the gun away with his handcuffed fists. It seems as if he pushed it down, toward his abdomen. I remember the bright flash of the gun against the black sweater.

Oswald's head shot back. His mouth opened wide as he moaned and doubled up. The two detectives handcuffed to Oswald staggered slightly as they tried to keep the wounded man up.

There was one moment of complete silence. Then it was hell.

Twenty detectives pounced on Ruby. A violent struggle exploded on the floor of the garage. People were screaming: "Shut the doors, shut the doors!" "Get him!" "Watch it, watch it!"

They were fighting for Ruby's gun. I heard feet shuffling. Men grunted and cursed. I saw an arm sticking out of the wild jumble of men. Then a hand, clutching a pistol, stuck out from the rolling, fighting men. The gun was waving in my face.

"Oswald has been shot! Oswald has been shot!" Those were the only words I could manage to shout into my microphone, at that moment. I stood frozen.

"Stay where you are!" someone screamed. It was a Dallas patrolman. He stood crouched, spread-legged. His left arm was thrust out from his shoulder. In his right hand was a cocked service revolver. It was pointing at me.

Every policeman in the basement pulled a gun. The doors of the garage were slammed shut. It was even darker than before. Wild thoughts raced through my mind:

"Is there another assassin loose in the garage? Look out behind you! Maybe the police will open up on everyone! Did I get hit with a ricochet?"

People kept screaming, running, diving over guard rails, crawling on the floor, doing everything they could to get out of the way.

I jumped behind a concrete pillar and heard a scream. A reporter huddled behind the pillar, a terrified look on his face. He had his hands thrust up to his chest, clutching a pencil and a notebook, his back pressed against the pillar. What frightened him was my long "pencil" microphone. It looks like a rifle barrel. The reporter thought I was going to shoot him. I tried to reassure him, then I crouched low behind the pillar, saying things into the mike I couldn't remember until I played back the tape.

Several men dragged Oswald back into the building. The struggle with Ruby continued. Finally, they hauled him in bodily. I came out from behind the pillar.

Oswald lay on the floor of the entranceway. He was dying in front of me. An ambulance was called. It ar-

rived in minutes. Oswald lay flat on a mobile cot. As he was rolled out toward the ambulance he looked even whiter than I had seen him before.

He was unconscious. His mouth gaped open. His left arm dangled over the edge of the cot. A detective grabbed it and shoved it across his chest. I saw a bullet hole in his lower left side. Oddly, there was little blood. The bullet had ripped into Oswald's intestines, coursed upward through his stomach and aorta, and lodged in his back, just underneath the skin. He didn't have a chance.

Oswald was bounced into the ambulance. A detective hopped in and the ambulance roared out of the garage.

"Damn it, damn it!" one detective kept muttering. His fists were clenched.

Back up on the third floor again, the circus resumed, only this time the tempo was different.

Jack Ruby's friends, his lawyers, his relatives, were beginning to rush into the City Hall.

Then we waited again, and they brought Ruby into the Homicide office. And we shouted the same questions at him that we shouted at Oswald: "Why? Why? Why?"

Ruby's eyes darted from face to face—just as Oswald's eyes had done. The detectives brought Ruby into the same complex of offices where Oswald had been only an hour earlier and sat him in the same seat that Oswald had sat in only an hour earlier, and they began to question him, as they had questioned Oswald.

And the vending machines again poured out the cigarettes and coffee, peanuts, ice cream, milk and sandwiches.

Late that afternoon, trying to comprehend what had transpired that terrible weekend, I walked down to the Elm Street incline, to the small hillside which rises over the spot where the President was shot.

The sun was fading. The evidence of the guilt complex Dallas was developing was strewn over the hillside. Residents of the city had placed wreaths on the hillside. Basically all of them carried the same message: "We are sorry."

There was one from a little boy named Alfie, who wrote in large, scrawly letters that he loved the President.

And another from a housewife who sewed four white carnations on a white heart and wrote the word "sympathy" across it.

As I walked among the wreaths, a woman came up to me. A little girl, about six years old, held tightly to the woman's hand.

The woman handed me a note which read:

"Can you please tell my little girl why that man killed the President?"

"Can't you tell her?" I asked.

The woman moved her lips, but no sounds came out. She motioned to her throat and her eyes filled with tears as she formed the words:

"I can't speak."
She was mute.

So there, on the hillside, I kneeled and held out my arms toward the child. But she moved behind her mother's skirts and held fast to her knees.

As I groped for an answer for the little girl, I realized I had none. For the answer, the real one, had died with Lee Harvey Oswald, in that cold, darkened basement, only a few hours earlier.

A sense of unreality took hold of me. "Could all this have really happened?"

* THE END