BOB CONSIDINE

Ruby Attained Goal—'To Be Somebody'

THE DALLAS COPS—God fend for them—were consistent to the end. They treated Jack Ruby for a chest cold for three weeks before sending him off to a hospital where he soon died of a somewhat more lethal complaint. Cancer!

Before that they let him kill the killer of the President of the United States and let him mingle with the swarm of newsmen they had senselessly permitted Lee Oswald to be exposed to on the night of the assassination. Ruby was a brassy pseudo-tough guy whose admission ticket to police headquarters might be a bag of stale sandwiches, a couple bottles of beer, a free drink at his strip tease joint, or an introduction to a passive pealer.

But he'll make the history books, Jack Ruby will. He would have settled in life to have had somebody wearing a Brooks Brothers suit, or even a goateed Dallas disc-jockey, say to him: "Jack, you're a classy guy!"

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INSTEAD, RUBY HIT the jackpot. He became one of the worst known men in modern history. He killed a hated killer, was the central figure in a preposterously hoked-up trial, received the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court in his cell, declared himself a champion of Jewish guts (Israeli border guards tended to dissent), beat a death rap and was all set for a second trial which would have surely resulted in his being given a comparatively light sentence subject to parole after a few years.

Then, like a damned fool, he died.

Ruby was quoted during his trial as telling one of the Dallas cops who questioned him, minutes after he plugged Oswald, that he did it to spare Jacqueline Kennedy the agony of returning to Dallas to testify at Oswald's inevitable trial.

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AS A RUBY-WATCHER from the day he killed Oswald until the end of his garish trial, I could never buy his plea of innocent on-the-grounds-of-Chesterfieldian-nobility. I think Ruby killed Oswald for the same reason that thousands, maybe millions, of others would have killed him at that time. Ruby killed Oswald for killing a president as admired and appealing as John Fitzgerald Kennedy. How many otherwise peaceful citizens said to themselves in the immediate wake of the assassination, "If I could get my hands on that fellow who shot Kennedy, I'd . . . ."? I know I did. Didn't you?

I think Ruby expected to get a medal. Maybe he had seen John Barrymore heroically strangle the despotic Resputin (Lionel Barrymore) on the Late Late Show. Whatever, I always felt and will continue to feel that Ruby simply did what came naturally at a time of massive national and international grief and anger. If Ruby had not killed Oswald, somebody else almost surely would have. That "somebody" could have ranged all the way from a fellow prisoner who revered JFK, or had little to lose, to the majesty of Dallas County justice.

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THE JURY IN AN OSWALD trial—having heard such witnesses as Mrs. Kennedy, President Johnson, Mrs. Johnson and Governor and Mrs. John Connally—would not have deliberated even as long as Ruby's jury did. Ruby's peers ruminated just long enough to gulp another free breakfast. Meanwhile, a county prosecutor named Alexander, renowned in Dallas, for his graveyard humor, pantomimed a hanging by yanking his bright red necktie out of his coat and stretching it obscenely upright over his head, in front of reporters waiting outside the courtroom for the jury to return.

He might have known something, Alexander.

Anyway, the little punk who yearned to be a big shot is dead and gone. He was the least of his brothers and sisters and, for all we know, it might have been they he was trying to impress as well as the world. Jack Ruby bit off more than he could chew, thanks in part to a stupid police force which should have been more interested in pinching him than accepting his tiny largesse and giving him the run of the premises. But he must have secretly swelled with pride throughout his ordeal. He had once carried a bucket into the prize ring for his idol, Barney Ross, and that great man, who now also is cancer ridden, flew to Dallas to testify as his character witness. All that, on top of having the run of the Dallas police department premises.

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THERE WILL BE A Jack Ruby vogue for a long time to come. Books surely will be published contesting the man's protestation that he was not part of any conspiracy. Ruby is to be damned, it seems to me, only for yielding to an easy temptation to kill the man who killed JFK. Oswald, having proved himself to the U.S. Marines to be a bad marksman, may conceivably have testified at his trial that he deeply admired the president and was simply trying to perforate Gov. Connally, with whom he had some highly disappointing correspondence. Such a plea would not have saved Oswald from the electric chair, in all probability, but it would have given the historian meat on which to munch to kingdom come. Jack Ruby, now dead, cut the world off from that knowledge.