

A Bouncer at History's Door

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★ Was Ruby a Conspirator, Insane, or Reflex-Slayer? ★

By **DICK HITT**
Staff Writer

He had a clumsy and smothering, and unrequited, love for the show-business milieu.

He relished the tawdry tall-cum spotlights and the granite girths and the cardboard customers, the strident bands, the way the customers would fill a room with planes of sapphire smoke and then try to peer through it at the strippers.

He stayed in the show-business idiom until the end; Jack Ruby was the bouncer at his-

tory's door. Whether as conspirator, as psychomotor epileptic or as avenging vigilante, Jack Ruby silenced the man who, guilty or innocent, was the starting point in the quest for a president's assassin.

WAS HE A CONSPIRATOR? If so, he was history's biggest patsy.

Was he insane? If so, then his legacy to the world has been to add more weight to the burden of frustrations and irrationality.

Was he reflex-murderer, blasting Lee Harvey Oswald on some automation impulse?

Or was he a deluded messenger of retribution, a tormented, self-commissioned envoy of jus-

tice who could shoot a man-aced man and then tell police he did it . . . to let the world know that Jews do have guts."

There are those who knew Jack Ruby before Nov. 24, 1963,

who thought he would be capable of doing anything for publicity. They said so on Nov. 25, 1963.

What Jack did, for whatever reason, has added a new dimension to the realm of publicity. He became a quantum celebrity. He had had his name in more papers more times than Frank Sinatra and Dr. Jonas Salk and Albert Einstein. He had had more lawyers than Dreyfus, Sacco, Vanzetti and Herman Goer-

ing.

JACK RUBY was a noted killer. He and cancer.

While he spent three years in a spacious, monastic solitary confinement as the sole prisoner in Dallas County Jail section 6M, the remnants of his former life went on without him. He was fond of his two dogs, the dachshunds named Clipper and Sheba. Clipper now belongs to the children of a television news-

man. Sheba was given to an ex-stripper at the Carousel Club.

The Carousel Club, in an irony commensurate with the other grotesque benchmarks in the Jack Ruby case, is now a gym operated by the Dallas Police Athletic Association.

Ruby's roommate George Sen-

ator left Dallas a year ago. "He went off with some rug peddler," says a friend of Senator's, "and no one has heard from him since."

AS THE WORLD learned more about Jack Ruby, the less it knew. The Warren Commission, with its carte blanche expense account, put Jack Ruby under a microscope and produced a voluminous picture of him, out of focus. The Warren Report could list Jack Ruby's gross income and net profit for the year 1968,

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See "The U.F.O. Affair" tonight at 6:30 on The Girl From UNCLE on WDFW-TV (Chicago) (Adv.)

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but it could not obtain his birth-date. It listed six. Ruby himself gave various ages in the course of filing various legal documents. The discrepancies are typical of the enigmatic fabric of Jack Ruby, who was born not Jack Ruby but Jack Rubinstein.

He was mercurial and inconsistent in his sometimes affable, sometimes volatile temperament as well. Once, having renegeed on a fee to show producer Joe Peterson, Ruby punched Peterson and knocked out a tooth. Within a few days they were friends again.

In his early weeks in jail, he complained to a lawyer because his friend and roommate George Senator had not been to see him. He said he would like to have a visit from him. On the next day, a visit was arranged. When Senator walked in to see Ruby, the prisoner's reaction was explosive: "You s.o.b., you're wearing my best suit! I was gonna wear that suit at my trial!"

"That suit," recalls a Dallas lawyer, "got worn to Ruby's trial, all right, but Senator was the one who wore it."

WHILE RUBY sat in jail and brooded over things like who was wearing his suits, Melvin Belli came to Dallas with an elegant wardrobe, a velvet-covered briefcase and a cavalier repertoire of legal devices. The trial was about to begin, and while Melvin Belli cut a sprightly swath through Dallas circles, dropping hints about how insane Jack Ruby was, a lot of other people went a little bit insane.

The world press was here, representing everything from *Blick*, a Swiss magazine, to the *Brisbane Sunday Truth*. Some of the reporters didn't care where they found fresh angles. If a bartender mentioned to one that he had heard Jack Ruby and Lee Harvey Oswald were roommates at Princeton, the story got printed somewhere. On the day testimony in the trial was ending, the reporters, foreign and domestic, got up what came to be known as a ghoulish pool, each contributing a dollar, the point being to guess correctly what sentence the jury would assess, winner take all. There were 82 entries and 17 ties for the pot with "death."

THE TRIAL OVER, Belli, who



Times Herald photographer Robert Jackson's Pulitzer Prize picture of Jack Ruby at the moment he shot accused presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald.

had let his impecability lapse by showing up in court on verdict day in a black golf shirt, buttoned at the collar, petulantly stalked off to Mexico. The floodgates opened then for an almost Byzantine procession of lawyers.

The Jack Ruby Bar Association at one time or another included these men, who at one time or another were locked in combat with prosecutors, appeals barriers, time limits and each other:

Tom Howard. C. A. Droby. Jim Martin. Phil Burleson. Melvin M. Belli. Joe Tonahill. Sam Brody. Vasilios Choulos. Percy Foreman. Dr. Hubert Winston Smith. Clayton Fowler. Emmett Colvin. Charles Bellows. Sol Dann. Elmer Gertz. William Kunstler. Sam Houston Clinton. Stanley Kaufman.

FOR THREE YEARS Jack Ruby withered in jail, the prisoner in the tower like some arcane Count of Monte Cristo, coming to the window of the world periodically for appeals hearings, sanity hearings, injunction hearings against book-writing Judge Joe B. Brown.

Between the rare public appearances he languished in his cell, seeing with torment and

delusions and, eventually, gnawed by the vanguard of the cancer that would kill the rest of him.

Jack Ruby, the ex-loudmouth, was mute during his trial. His first public utterance seems to have been in the courthouse corridor when he stopped his phalanx of guards, and spoke into KRLD-TV newsman Wes Wise's microphone.

"How do you feel, Jack?" asked Wise.

"I feel okay," said Jack Ruby, in a measured, rational tone. He went on to make a statement while his lawyers shuddered and tried to silence him. The tone of voice remained rational at first, then became shrill and a little giddy as Ruby said he hoped everyone realized he was the victim of a conspiracy. He said the scope of the conspiracy staggered the imagination. He said the American people would be shocked if they ever learned what was going on.

Frequently, remembers one of his lawyers, Jack Ruby would scribble a succession of phone numbers on slips of paper and hand them to the occasional visitors he had in his cell. "Call these numbers," he

pleaded. "These people have been murdered. They're all out to get the Jews. They won't answer these numbers because they're dead."

The phone numbers, several times, were those of his sister, Eva Grant, and his brother Earl Ruby.

In the late spring of 1966, attorney Jim Martin visited the sixth floor to confer with a client. Jack Ruby spotted him and hissed, "Jim—come here a minute." Ruby wanted to know how his dachshund, Clipper, was doing.

After his conference with his client, Martin was waiting at the corridor door when Ruby again called him over.

"It was good to see you, Jim," said Ruby, thrusting his hand through the bars to shake hands with the lawyer. During the handshake, Ruby slipped Martin four small slips of memo paper, covered on both sides with handwriting in soft, barely legible soft-lead pencil. Martin had the impression that Ruby had written it while Martin had been conferring with his client.

Martin pocketed the message and stopped at a nearby restaurant to read it.

The message written in a neat, delicate and slightly feminine handwriting, and obviously coming from a warped mind in its last incoherent and flagging stages, read:

"Jim,

"YOU MAY THINK I am out of my mind but I want you take (sic) it for what it's worth. This country has been overthrown, by the Nazi's. Johnson is a Nazi, the worst kind, that is why they won't let anyone come talk to me. They know that I know too much and don't want me to talk to anyone.

"Jim, see if I am right. They are doing away (sic) all the Jews. Don't ignore what I am saying, but if you wait a few days and I prove that I am right in what I'm telling you, then I'm no doubt right in everything else. Jim believe me I'm not crazy, that is what they want everyone to believe, so that that (sic) when I talk to anyone they will just ignore me.

"Johnson appointed these Jews to high office, to show he is not

prejudiced, and so people will not suspect him for what he really is. Later one (sic), everything I'm telling you here will out the truth.

"ALL OF THE democracies are in great danger, because they don't know who is behind the American government at this time.

"Jim, your Ireland and England should be warned of what is happening in the country, in that way they can protect themselves.

"Jim you must believe me, but just don't say a word and keep your eyes open. Take this for what it's worth and keep it to yourself. Wade, Alexander, Watts Bowie, Judge Brown, Phil Burleson Joe Tonahill are all Nazi's. In those other countries must be warned as to what is happening. You must find a way to get to England, France, Switzerland, Israel and all democratic countries and warn them. Your enemy countries are all the old Axis countries of World War II. Japan, East & West Germany, Egypt and all of South America.

"Jim you have always known as to what makes me tick, and you know how ridiculous it would be to brand me out a Communist.

"This is what they have framed up on me, that I was in on the conspiracy to assassinate the President.

"Jim if find (sic) out what I say is true, that they are doing away with the Jews. Then I am right about a lot of things. This is what I've got to say and take it for what it's worth. Russia must be told immediately (sic) who the real enemy is, and in that way they can answer Johnson if Johnson provokes a war, that they will not bomb the U.S. only those former Axis countries I mentioned, and in that way Johnson will back off, because he doesn't want anything to happen to his master race.

"Believe me Jim, I know what I'm talking about.

"Of both evils either the Nazi's or Russians you are better off with the Russians at least the Russians will let you live.

"THAT IS THE reason why I

jumped all over Mike (the next word is illegible but appears to be "Howard,") "because they think he might be telling him about us (or it).

Something must be done immediately, these people (the next two or three words are illegible). "Of course you warn Israel too because she is in the

middle she thinks she is an ally of the U.S. but how wrong can she be, and don't turn to Russia."

The letter, or tract, is interesting on several points, especially in his indignant reference to his complicity in any Communist conspiracy, and in his tendency to flit from one obsession to another in the writing. The letter generally was meticulous in its script and, surprisingly, in its proper spelling with the exception of the word "immediately" in one instance. It was spelled correctly another time. Ruby had access to a dictionary.

The Times Herald submitted one page of the four to a handwriting analyst. The analyst's examination was cursory and entirely informal. The analyst was not told the identity of the writer, but only that the writer was male. In the study of the characteristics of the handwriting, the analyst noted these salient qualities:

"The subject writes in a more feminine than masculine hand.

"The subject shows a tendency toward clannishness.

"THE MANNER in which the subject forms his t's shows determination, accompanied with a concentration of thought.

"The subject appears to be bothered by some sort of sex problem, possibly one of having abstained from sexual experiences.

"The hand shows certain desires along idealistic avenues, but he cannot seem to follow through.

"The subject's capital I shows he has a severe problem where he himself is concerned; it could be a persecution complex."

"THE SUBJECT is capable of terrible temper.

"The subject appears to be very tenacious, though suscep-

tible to a muddledness.

"The subject shows a slight athletic propensity.

"The subject is extremely direct."

Incredibly, the analyst in 10 minutes discovered as much about Jack Ruby as the Warren Commission's report set forth after months of research.

He was so many other things, and the world watched his three-year transition from a brash, strutting *boi* who carried boxes of pastrami sandwiches to the police station on assassination night.

What the burly brawler, the dachshund lover with the cockerspaniel eyes, became was a pallid and wasted and very famous haunted, dying man. To his conspirators, if any, he would be a slob who held the bag and died with it; a nebbish, as he himself would have put it in the Yiddish patois.

Eaten from within by cancer and battered from without by the world which perhaps could hold compassion for what happened to him, but could never forgive him for what he did and what he took from it: Jack Ruby.