

In The Nation: Unplanned Left Turn Into History

By TOM WICKER

WASHINGTON, Jan. 4—Jack Ruby was an unimposing little man, physically tough but soft and unsure and disturbed within himself. He was an unlikely agent of history or of anything else, and as his body lies in the funeral home of Original Weinstein & Son at Chicago the great drama in which he was so strangely involved three years ago is only the more inexplicable.

Like the cancer that contributed to his death, Ruby, too, appears to have been a blind killer without known cause; so, perhaps, was the man he murdered, Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin of President Kennedy.

Unanswered Questions

Why did Oswald shoot? Because of Jack Ruby, no one is ever to know.

Was Oswald acting alone? Because of Ruby, that is unlikely to be proved to a certainty.

Was it to keep these questions unanswered, then, that Jack Ruby lunged between careless policemen to kill Lee Oswald? There are only Ruby's maundering words, and a lack of contrary evidence, to show that it was not.

The thesis of the Warren

Commission — that Oswald, alone and because of obscure mental disturbances, killed the President, and that Ruby, equally alone and for equally indefinable motives, killed Oswald—provides the only rationale of the assassination that accounts for its major episodes, despite the lesser incidents it may not explain.

But even for those who accept the Warren Report, the Dallas drama can never be a clear case of cause and effect that can be analyzed and fully understood through lawyers' evidence and scientists' data. For that reason, Jack Ruby, the strip-tease proprietor who could throw hecklers down the stairs of his club but who anguished over the fate of the Jews and at the end longed to go home to the Chicago that shaped him, will linger grotesquely in history.

Chance put him there, if his words are to be believed, because chance put him in the basement of the Dallas Police Department on Nov. 24, 1963.

As he drove past the building, he said, a slow-moving bus gave him an unexpected opportunity to make an illegal left turn into a parking lot near the telegraph office, instead of going farther on as he had intended.

That ("thirty seconds ore

way or the other," he said) caused him to see the crowd at the police building, to join it out of curiosity. When Oswald appeared, Ruby "blacked out" and entered history in a trance.

'To Show the World . . .'

Or perhaps not; Ruby said at other times that he killed Oswald to spare Mrs. Kennedy further ordeal, and "to show the world that Jews have guts."

Either way, if Ruby was to be believed at all, chance was at the root of it—the chance to make an unexpected turn, the chance of a cloudy brain and feverish emotions and a pistol in his pocket coming together with lax security in that time and that place.

If the Warren Commission's conclusions about Oswald are generally correct, chance was as hard at work on Nov. 22—the chance that put Oswald in a job on the motorcade route, with his barely stifled hostilities, his bitter home life, his rifle and his ability to fire it, on a clear day when there would be no protective cover over a President's automobile.

And it was chance, finally, that struck Jack Ruby with cancer and the final blood clot be-

fore a more orderly court could seize the last opportunity to make sense of him and his deed.

That is why, finally, the assassination and the rest of the drama of those November days must always be something of a mystery—despite the Warren Commission's labors, the books, the articles, the investigations. That is why new evidence, or the lack of it, probably never will still all doubts.

Capricious Malice of Chance

For at the heart of those doubts is the unwillingness or the inability of men calling themselves rational to accept the capricious malice of chance—the malignant fate that could place Lee Oswald in the one job that would give him a window from which to strike senselessly at a despised world, that could allow Jack Ruby an unplanned left turn into history, in which a loveless orphan and a Chicago street kid, without known cause or visible connection, could convulse humanity.

Shouldn't there be a better answer than that available to men who believe they can discover the secret of cancer? Not necessarily, but in neither case are they likely to stop looking.