THE TRUTH ABOUT THE ASSASSINATION

Jack Ruby Was Obsessed With Yearning for Fame

RECORD AMERICAN, BOSTON, FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 1967

(Fourth in a series of six articles excerpted from "The Truth About the Assassination," newly-published study by an eyewitness reporter of the controversial questions surrounding the murder of President Kennedy.)

By CHARLES ROBERTS

The story of Jack Ruby's life is that he wanted to be a big shot and never made it. On November 24, 1963, two days after President Kennedy's assassination, he shot his way into history with one well-aimed bullet from a .38 caliber revolver. But even then, playing before a nationwide TV audience, he failed in his ambition. The man he killed, Lee Harvey Oswald, was an easy target, manacled to a detective. And the world, it turned out, wanted that man to live — so that he could answer for the murder of John F. Kennedy.

When Ruby died of a blood clot in his cancerous lungs three years later at Parkland Hospital — where Kennedy and Oswald had died before him — he was awaiting a second trial for the murder of Oswald. Convicted once, he had escaped the electric chair on grounds he didn't get a fair trial. He had made headlines and achieved notoriety. In the eyes of some authors he had become part of a conspiracy. But he still hadn't achieved the "class" that he sought from boyhood to the grave.

At 11, with an "adequate" I.Q. of 94, but truant and "incorrigible at home," Ruby, growing up on Chicago's West Side, was referred to Illinois' Institute for Juvenile Research. "He is egocentric and expects much attention, but is unable to get it as there are many children at home," his psychiatric interviewer reported.

As a high school dropout he scalped tickets for football games and fights, hustled peanuts, sold horse racing tip sheets, peddled carnations in nightclubs, and hung out at Dave Miller's gym.

There, one of his idols, Barney Ross, worked out. Barney, who once ran errands for Al Cappone, became a big shot — world's lightweight and welterweight champion. It was in the Capone Era in Chicago. Some of Ruby's other West Side friends made it big in the gangs.

Drafted in 1943, Ruby served three years stateside in the Army Air Force, rising to the rank of private first class. Occasionally he peddled punchboard chances, and in his barracks was rated a better card player than soldier. He was an "emotional person," his staff sergeant recalled, who "wept openly" when FDR died.

In Chicago after the war, Ruby became a natty dresser, a moderately successful ladies' man, and a quarrelsome partner in a novelty manufacturing business (key chains, bottle openers) with brothers Earl and Sam. When the brothers paid him $14,000 to quit the business in 1947 he joined sister Eva in a Dallas venture called the Singapore Supper Club. He also changed his name to Ruby. From that day until he shot Oswald, Ruby was an operator of unsuccessful night clubs.

The Dallas cops knew him as a "police buff." The Warren Commission found "no credible evidence that Ruby sought special favors," but concluded gingerly that "his relationship to members of the Dallas Police Department is not susceptible of conclusive evaluation."

If Ruby sought favors in return for his favors, he got mixed results. He was arrested 20 times for traffic violations, paid seven fines, and twice was placed on probation as an "habitual motor vehicle violator." He was arrested eight times on charges as disturbing the peace, carrying a concealed weapon (twice), simple assault, selling liquor after hours, permitting dancing after hours (twice), and ignoring his traffic tickets. Here he fared better than the average citizen, paying only a $10 fine for disturbing the peace, forfeiting bonds of $25 and $35 on the dancing and scofflaw charges, and getting complaints dropped or winning dismissal on the rest.

This is the man that Lane, Weisberg, Buchanan and other doubters of the Warren Commission Report pretend to believe played a key role in a conspiracy by killing Oswald. With most of the critics, who are spared the necessity of offering more than innuendoes by way of proof, the implication is that Ruby was part of a conspiracy that killed Kennedy, too. The charge is made in oblique fashion:

"Whether Oswald was murdered because he was part of a conspiracy and the conspirators wanted to silence him or because his ultimate vindication would have caused a search for the real criminals to take place," says Lane, "from the point of view of the assassins the decision to murder Oswald — though the risks involved were immense — might well have been soundly calculated."

By the time the reader untangles the subjunctives of that sinister pronouncement, he is confronted with these alternatives by Lane: () Oswald was trigger man in a conspiracy to kill Kennedy, after which Ruby, one of several other conspirators, killed Oswald to silence him, or (2) Oswald was innocent of Kennedy's murder, but the "assassins" (plural), including Ruby, decided to kill him so that the "real criminals" would not be sought.

The mind boggles at either alternative. First, the thought of Oswald and Ruby, two unlikely plotters, who didn't know each other, participating in a scheme whereby Oswald wound up dead and Ruby was sentenced to the electric chair — all without either Oswald or the garrulous Ruby talking — must tax the imagination even of far-out whodunit fans. Second, the idea of Oswald, who owned the rifle that killed Kennedy, being entirely innocent, but still getting rubbed out by the assassins who did kill Kennedy, with Ruby as their killer, is beyond human ken.

But Lane is not deterred by such problems so long as he has a credulous audience and a few discredited witnesses — or a witness whose identity only he knows.

The Commission, after a thorough investigation of the crime itself, also investigated Ruby and found him an improbable conspirator. (Its investigation included not only tracing hundreds of Ruby's long distance calls, but calls made by people Ruby called.)

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