Jack Ruby's Gun Seized In Encounter at Capitol

Man Says He Wanted to Show Pistol to Foley

3/30/92

By Brian Mooar
Washington Post Staff Writer

U.S. Capitol Police seized the pistol Jack Ruby used to kill Lee Harvey Oswald after a man carried the $220,000 weapon to Capitol Hill and on a whim offered to show it to House Speaker Thomas S. Foley, police said yesterday.

Robert Luongo, a representative of the pistol's owner, said he meant no harm and considered the unloaded gun, bought at an auction, to be more a piece of history than a weapon. Luongo said he is terrified that the weapon might meet the fate of other firearms seized in the District: destruction. A judge will have to decide whether usual policy will be followed, police said yesterday.

The Saturday afternoon incident has flushed out the owner of the gun, who had gone to great lengths to maintain his anonymity. Local lawyer Allen Dale said he was retained yesterday by the gun's owner, Anthony Pugliese, of Florida, to try to get it back.

Luongo was in town to appear with the gun on the "Larry King Live" television show Friday and ended up in jail overnight when his enthusiasm for showing it off attracted the attention of police.

Luongo, 37, of Ocean Ridge, Fla., said upon his release from jail yesterday that his ordeal began as "a simple naive scenario." He said he decided to sightsee for a few hours before catching a flight home and was simply unaware that the District's stringent gun laws require carrying permits even for historic, unloaded guns.

He complained bitterly that police knew he had the battered .38-caliber Colt Cobra packed in a locked case for nearly 30 minutes before his arrest. While strolling on the Capitol grounds, he met a young police officer and began talking about the mysterious twists and turns of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Police and Luongo differ on whether Foley was directly approached.

See GUN, A9, Col. 3

D.C. May Destroy Gun That Was Used to Kill Oswald

GUN, From A1

Capitol Police spokesman Dan Nichols said Luongo was standing on the Capitol's east plaza about 2 p.m. when Foley (D-Wash.) entered the building. The officer pointed out Foley as the speaker, at which point Luongo reportedly said, "I bet he'd like to see the gun I have in my case." Nichols said the comment "concerned the officer greatly. That's when the officer asked if he could look into the bag and see the weapon."

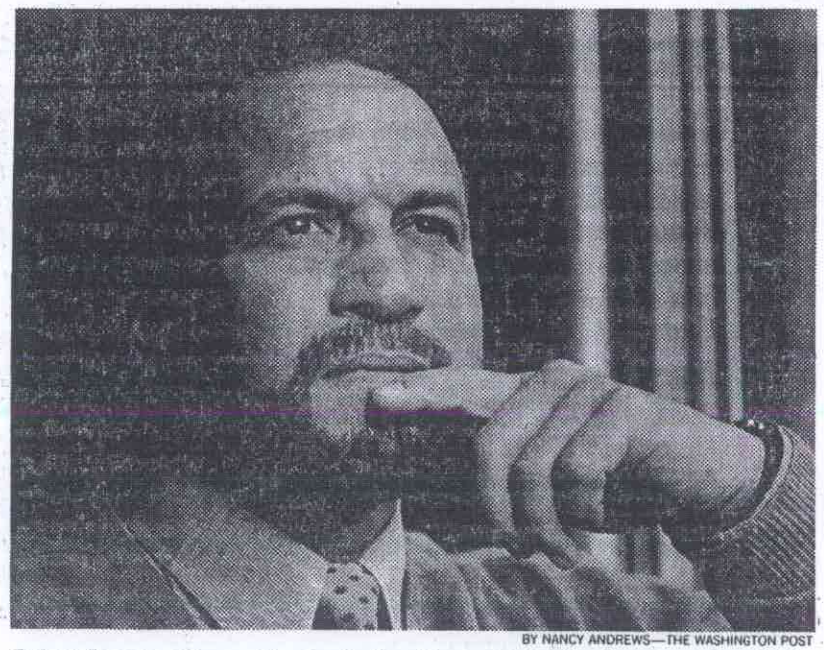
Police reports indicated Luongo immediately was arrested, before he had a chance to talk to Foley.

Luongo maintains that the reference to the Ruby gun came and went in a sentence, and the conversation meandered on for several minutes until Foley arrived.

"He said to me, 'That's Tom Foley,' and it didn't ring a bell," Luongo said. "Then [the officer] said, 'That's the third most powerful person in the United States.' "

Luongo said he waited about 30 minutes until Foley left the Capitol. Clutching the brown alligator bag that carried the gun case and Ruby gun in his left hand, Luongo said, he approached Foley, shook hands, introduced himself, engaged in a brief conversation and walked away without ever opening the bag containing the gun case. Luongo said he was arrested moments later.

Foley was unavailable for comment.



BY NANCY ANDREWS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Robert Luongo, 37, says the gun incident began as "a simple naive scenario."

Luongo was charged with carrying a pistol without a license, a misdemeanor under District law. He posted bond yesterday and was expected to be arraigned tomorrow in D.C. Superior Court.

Luongo said he was working with the owner of the gun to help fight what he characterized as "the second victimization" of Jack Ruby. Luongo and Ruby's younger brother, Earl, appeared on "Larry King Live" to denounce the new movie "Ruby," which portrays Ruby as a pawn in a mob-inspired assassination conspiracy.

The gun was auctioned off in New York last December and sold to a gun collector for $220,000. At the time of his arrest, Luongo told police he was carrying the weapon back to its owner in Florida. He told The Post that Pugliese is a part-owner of the revolver and that it has been purchased by a consortium. Pugliese, a real estate developer, declined to comment.

Luongo said he is one of Pugliese's partners and dabbles in real estate and other business ventures.

Capitol Police said they found it hard to believe that someone would be walking the streets with such a valuable weapon and even harder to believe that someone would display the weapon voluntarily to a police officer in a security-conscious fortress such as the Capitol.

They said the serial number on the gun was 2744-LW. The same serial number was on the gun used by Ruby, according to a 1978 report of the House Select Committee on Assassinations.

One source said several officers couldn't resist the urge to touch the gun used in Oswald's killing, an event that dashed any hope that Americans would know for sure why or even whether the former Marine murdered Kennedy.

Ruby bought the pistol in a Dallas pawnshop for $75 in 1961. It became the center of a two-decade tug-of-war to settle Jack Ruby's estate after he died of cancer in 1967. Earl Ruby went to court and won clear title to the gun and put it up for auction last year.

Now Jack Ruby's grim legacy has been thrust back into legal limbo.

"That's not up to us," said Nichols of the gun's future. "That will be up to the court system. The standard policy is that all weapons seized through arrest or otherwise are destroyed once the case has been disposed of."

Frank Roman, of Newark, another spokesman for the owner, said he has hope that the gun will be returned. "I think for any judge to make that decision [to destroy the gun], he would have to be out of his mind."