Swarm of Newsmen Hid Ruby, Editors Told

By Willard Clopton
Staff Reporter

The presence of a swarm of newsmen in the corridor outside the Dallas jail probably made possible the slaying of Lee Oswald, a Dallas police official said here yesterday.

Capt. Glen King said he was sure Jack Ruby would have been recognized and ejected if the hall had not been crowded with reporters.

King said he was not condemning the press. "They were there because we permitted them to be there."

But he added: "Now, with the benefit of hindsight, I am sure we would make some changes. There is no question but that newsmen interfered with out investigation."

Panel Discussion

King, administrative assistant to Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry, is a former newspaperman. He addressed the American Society of Newspaper Editors during a panel discussion of the part played by the press during the events surrounding President Kennedy's assassination.

Other speakers criticized the conduct of many of the reporters who went to Dallas to give "mass saturation coverage" to the tragedy and the subsequent trial of Ruby.

Homa Hill, public relations chairman for the Texas State Bar, charged that the "mob" of newsmen "forgot decency and courtesy in their zeal to give the world a story.

'They forgot the rights of the individual . . . to a fair trial. They forgot respect for our judiciary. They forgot respect for the courtroom."

Hill said he refused to join leaders of the American Bar Association in condemning the news media. But the Texas Bar adopted his proposal that it study the problem of mass coverage and make recommendations.

Joseph Costa, board chairman of the National Press Photographers Association, said that throughout the investigation and trial, principal figures were "badgered and hounded" with "irrelevant" questions.

"Responsible forces within the profession must police and dicipline the actions of its own reporters and cameramen," he said.

Editor Asks Answer

Felix R. McKnight, editor of the Dallas Times Herald, said much of the reporting was "great."

But he urged his colleagues to "come forth with an answer, and very soon" to the problems of "mass saturation coverage" that occur when 371 correspondents from 111 news-gathering organizations suddenly descend on a city.

He complained that some of the visitors reports contained "raw, planned distortions" and that some newsmen traveled hundreds of miles to Dallas only to turn out "superficial" accounts gleaned from "interviewing local reporters and reading their carbons."

Newspaper offices in Dallas, McKnight said, were "invaded and their reference files scattered, some of them permanently lost." He said he did not resent the presence of the visitors but only their "bad manners."

Elaborating on the Oswald shooting, Capt. King said he was "not at liberty" to give any details on how Ruby gained entrance to the basement corridor.

He did say that it resulted from "a temporary breakdown of security at one location" where the officer on guard "becuase of circumstances failed to see Ruby as he entered."