

Ruby's Historic Bullet Fell

By Charles Roberts

Fourth of six articles from "The Truth About the Assassination" by the White House correspondent of Newsweek.

The story of Jack Ruby's life is that he wanted to be a big shot and never made it. On Nov. 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 Mr. 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.

Too Many Children

At 11, with an "adequate" IQ 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 escaped tickets for football games and fights, hustled peanuts, sold horse racing tip sheets, peddled carnations in night clubs and hung out at Dave Miller's gym.

There, one of his idols, Bar-



JACK RUBY
... a failure

ney Ross, worked out. Barney, who once ran errands for Al Capone, became a big shot—world's lightweight and welterweight champion. It was 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 he was rated a better card player than soldier. He was an "emotional person," his staff sergeant recalled, who "wept openly"

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Short of Big-Shot.

when FDR died.

Fail to Get Out

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

Ambition

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 a "habitual motor vehicle violator." He was arrested eight times on such 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. He had a tougher time with the state Liquor Control Board, getting his license suspended twice for obscene shows, once for an employe's "moral turpitude" and once for writing bad checks to liquor wholesalers.

Conspiratorial Keystone?

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 Mr. 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: (1) Oswald was trigger man in a conspiracy to kill Mr. Kennedy, after which Ruby, one of several other conspirators, killed Oswald to silence him, or (2) Oswald was innocent of Mr. Kennedy's murder but the "assassins" (plural), including Ruby, decided to kill him so that the "real criminals" would not be sought.

Undigestible Alternatives

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 Mr. Kennedy, being entirely innocent but still getting rubbed out by the assassins who did kill Mr. 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. Having found evidence of a conspiracy under every bed, or hospital stretcher, Lane and Weisberg seem impelled to find that Ruby, the bumbling, weeping, quick-tempered, talkative saloonkeeper, was also part of a cabal so ingenious that it left no trace but the bodies of its victims.

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.)

"Aside from the results of the Commission's investigation reported above," the Report said, "there are other reasons to doubt that Jack Ruby would have shot Oswald as he

did if he had been involved in a conspiracy to carry out the assassination, or that he would have been delegated to perform the shooting of Oswald on behalf of others who were involved in the slaying of the President.

"By striking in the city jail, Ruby was certain to have been apprehended. An attempt to silence Oswald by having Ruby kill him would have presented exceptionally grave dangers to any other persons involved in the scheme. If the attempt had failed, Oswald might have been moved to disclose his confederates to the authorities. If it succeeded, as it did, the additional killing might itself have produced a trail to them. Moreover, Ruby was regarded by most persons who knew him as moody and unstable—hardly one to have encouraged the confidence of persons involved in a conspiracy."

No Credible Connection

The Warren Commission was unable to find any "direct or indirect relationship" between Oswald and Ruby, any credible evidence that they knew each other or any evidence that Ruby "acted with any other person" in killing Oswald. At the same time, it found no "evidence of conspiracy, subversion or disloyalty to the U.S. Government by any Federal, state or local officials."

One day after Jack Ruby died of complications arising from cancer in January—while he was still lying in Chi-

cago's Original Weinstein & Sons Funeral Home—the Soviet government newspaper Izvestia observed that Ruby's "suddenly discovered lethal illness" was suspicious. It cited "reports" that Ruby "suspected he had been infected with cancer through an injection given in jail." (He was removed from the Dallas County Jail to the hospital a month before his death. Several French newspapers took a similar line. And in London, the Sun, an independent, pro-Labor Party paper, noted that Ruby died "when

many people were questioning whether he was one of a ring of conspirators behind the shooting" of President Kennedy. Without waiting for any word from Dallas County Medical Examiner Earl Rose, the official who had tried to bar the removal of Mr. Kennedy's body from Parkland, half a dozen overseas publications decided that Ruby's death was "mysterious." Americans probably chuckled at these stories after seeing Dr. Rose's autopsy report: Ruby died of a massive blood clot in his lungs; he had advanced cancer of the lungs and eight small previously undiscovered brain tumors. There was no sign of foul play.

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