

BILL DECKER DIES; SHERIFF IN DALLAS

Was Leading the Motorcade
When Kennedy Was Killed

~~AUG 31 1970~~

Special to The New York Times

DALLAS, Aug. 29 — James Eric (Bill) Decker, sheriff of Dallas County for the last 22 years, died in Baylor Hospital here Saturday. He would have been 72 years old on Monday.

Mr. Decker was riding in the first car of the motorcade carrying President Kennedy through Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. He was to have taken custody of Kennedy's assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, but instead ended up with Jack Ruby, the Dallas nightclub operator who killed Oswald in the basement of the Dallas police station.

During Ruby's trial five prisoners escaped from the Dallas jail. Although they were recaptured, the escape subjected Mr. Decker to much criticism.

Mr. Decker was credited by some for the ambush that ended the careers of Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow on May 23, 1934, beside an east Louisiana swamp road. He told officers where to wait for the desperadoes, and later would only admit "somebody told me" where to set up the ambush.

When he appeared before the Warren Commission investigating the Kennedy assassination, Mr. Decker was asked to give a history of his life.

"I was chief deputy sheriff for Dallas County 14 years prior to that (election as sheriff in 1949)," he replied. "Prior to that I was chief deputy constable since 1924. Prior to that I was in the courthouse as a court clerk. Prior to that I was an elevator operator in the courthouse. That's my life."