

NEWS 11/26

NEWS ONE BURTON

GUY WRIGHT

Intruders In Press Gallery

Although I wasn't there, I can tell you how Jack Ruby got close enough to shoot Lee Harvey Oswald in the stomach.

So can any reporter if he'll be candid about it. And the outcry of journalistic mystification about how Ruby got past the security check at the Dallas jail is a little bit hard to swallow.

Virtually every reporter and every cop knows half a dozen Jack Rubys. They are a specialized kind of gate-crasher.

They are men who have some peripheral dealings with police and newsmen—as a nightclub operator Ruby is a classic example—so that their faces are familiar even though the memory bank may not click out their names immediately.

THEY TRADE UPON this familiarity to get into the roped-off area, the VIP zone, the section marked "authorized personnel only."

Afterward they like to boast how they were Right Up There.

Their system is simplicity itself. They sidle up to the cop in charge of checking credentials and say:

"Hi, Harry"—they make a point of knowing first names—"good to see you again. Mind if I take a look inside?"

The cop resents this imposition, but he's on the spot. He doesn't want to violate his orders. On the other hand, he recognizes the fellow, at least dimly, as a recurrent face in his work, and he's reluctant to create unpleasantness by turning him down.



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SO HE TAKES a well-established alternative that really isn't an alternative at all.

"Okay," he says, letting the man pass. "Squeeze in over there with the reporters."

You find the Jack Rubys in the press box at ball games, in the press seats at prize fights and wrestling matches, in the press gallery at political conventions and occupying the press benches at big murder trials.

To the legitimate newsmen these interlopers are a nuisance, taking up scarce space, getting in the way of photographers, gabbing when everyone else is straining his ears to get the quote right.

But newsmen tolerate them for the same reason that the cop let them in—because we don't want to be rude to a familiar face.

AND SO THE PRESS section becomes a catch-all for these characters. A policeman who wouldn't slip his own mother in to peanut heaven without proper credentials thinks nothing of letting some Jack Ruby type "squeeze in over there with the reporters."

By some peculiar rationalization admitting these hangers-on to the press section isn't regarded as a security violation—although the press almost always has a choice vantage point.

It is not my purpose to castigate the police. The abuse long ago achieved the sanctity of custom, and we in the news-gathering field must share the blame for having tolerated it.

We regarded it as merely an occupational irritation. We were wrong.