

Judge for Ruby Trial

Joseph Brantley Brown

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DALLAS, Feb. 17—When Judge Joseph Brantley Brown began presiding over the murder trial of Jack L. Ruby today, he set two small bottles before him on the bench.

One held some capsules to help him fight off the stomach virus that plagued him last week. The other bottle contained a headache remedy, and few observers would dispute that Judge Brown has been handed the largest judicial headache in Dallas history.

But the judge is not the only person discomforted by his assignment, through an automatic rotation system among the district judges, to the case. Civic and business leaders in Dallas have been outspoken in lamenting the prospect of his conducting the trial.

In appearance, the 55-year-old judge gives no clue to the reason for their lack of confidence. He dresses quietly; his gray-white hair is carefully combed; his eyes gleam with humor behind horn-rimmed glasses; and his voice is soft and resonant.

Critics, however, find his courtroom manner easy-going to the point of low comedy. They also contend that he either does not know or does not care for the fine points of the law.

A Casual Attitude

If his earlier judicial manner was casual, it reflected Judge Brown's attitude toward life.

In 1931, while he was working as a railroad rate clerk, he met a friend on a Dallas street.

"He told me he was going down to enroll in night law courses at Jefferson University," the judge said. "I went with him."

When he was graduated three years later, Joe Brown ran for Justice of the Peace in the Oak Cliff section of the city. He was elected and began moving up the judicial ladder without ever having acquired or argued a case.

He reached his present post in 1956, when he unseated a popular incumbent.

"I just got out and asked people to vote for me," he recalls.

With his hearty handshake and unexpectedly gentle smile, the judge is a hard man to refuse. Miss Candy Barr, a striptease dancer, learned that when she was brought into Judge Brown's court on a narcotics charge.

The judge called a recess, invited her into his chambers, brought out his camera and persuaded her to pose for photographs. Although Miss Barr remained fully clothed, the incident did not escape public notice. The story is the first that a newcomer to Dal-



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las hears about Judge Brown.

Another case is recalled in which a ruling by the judge was challenged by defense attorneys. Judge Brown offered to call a recess, go down the hall and check his ruling with another judge.

"They say I run an informal court," the judge said recently. "What does that mean? All I know is, I try to treat everyone with courtesy."

Dignity Maintained

Judge Brown conducted the preliminary hearings for Jack Ruby, who shot and killed the accused assassin of President Kennedy with a self-conscious dignity.

Judge Brown's broad features remained impassive throughout the hearing although privately he confesses to being fascinated by the case. His gavel cut short every chuckle from the audience.

A rumor had circulated that Dallas leaders had threatened to put an opposition candidate in this year's judicial race if Judge Brown did not behave. But the filing for his office, Judge of Criminal Court District No. 3, closed Feb. 3, and the judge has remained restrained and wary of publicity.

As relaxation, Judge Brown frequently plays bridge and fishes when he has the time. About three times a year, he goes deer hunting, but he never fires a shot.

"I've had four heart attacks, the last one in May, 1960," he explains. "They change your values. I don't want to kill any thing."

Because of his illnesses, he has stopped smoking cigarettes. Instead he has amassed more than 200 pipes. The judge and his wife, Evelyn, have two children, a married daughter, a son who had succeeded his father as Justice of the Peace in Oak Cliff, and six grandchildren.