

Rby

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7 Flee Dallas Jail, Passing Door of Ruby Courtroom



Associated Press Wirephoto

Clarence D. Gregory holds false pistol at back of Mrs. Ruth Thornton in Dallas jailbreak

By JACK LANGGUTH
Special to The New York Times

DALLAS, March 6—Seven prisoners escaped from the Dallas County Jail today, fleeing past the door of the courtroom where Jack L. Ruby is on trial for murder. One of them carried a pistol carved from soap. Brandishing it, he terrified a striptease dancer who was waiting to testify in Ruby's defense. Four of the men were caught shortly after their escape at 3:30 P.M. The three others remained at large.

Sheriff Bill Decker said the prisoners had escaped from a day room on the sixth floor of the County Courts and Jail Building. Ruby, who shot the accused assassin of President

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Kennedy, is on trial on the second floor of the building.

The prisoners were serving terms for armed robbery. Commandeering an elevator, they made their way to a jail entrance on the second floor. Snatching keys from a jailer, they fled into the courthouse corridors.

Karen Lynn Bennett, a dancer at one of Ruby's nightclubs, was waiting in the hallway to testify. With her was Mrs. Melvin M. Belli, the wife of the chief defense counsel. The dancer became hysterical when she saw one of the prisoners rush by with the makeshift gun.

"He's after me! He's after me!" she screamed. Then she slumped to the floor. Sheriff's deputies revived her.

The first man apprehended, Robert Jenkins, was caught by Leon Davis, a 22-year-old messenger for the Columbia Broadcasting System.

Meanwhile, another prisoner, Clarence D. Gregory, had grabbed Edna Biggs, a clerk in the probations department, and held the soap pistol in her ribs. When she wriggled free, she

ran into the offices of Judge John Mead with Gregory following her.

Judge Mead's clerk, Mrs. Ruth Thornton, was seated at her desk.

"This man came rushing in and said, 'Show me a way out of here.' I told him, 'There's no way out but the window,'" Mrs. Thornton said continuing: "He said, 'No, I'm walking out of here and you're walking with me.'"

With the gun pressed into her back, Gregory forced Mrs. Thornton to walk through the corridor, past photographers and television cameramen who were outside the Ruby courtroom.

At the parking lot, Gregory and Mrs. Thornton were surrounded by sheriff's deputies. The convict was disarmed of his soap pistol by Deputy Charles Player.

The other prisoners escaped in the confusion. Hershell A. Crocker and Tommy P. Calverl were picked up soon afterward a few blocks from the courthouse. The police were still searching for Billy Ray Brock, Randolph Hudnall and Lennard F. Driggers.