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Jack Ruby—He Acted Alone

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Jack L. Ruby, convicted slayer of Lee Harvey Oswald, played a lone hand as the assassin's assassin.

There is no evidence that the tempestuous Dallas nightclub owner had any connection with the assassination of President Kennedy, or was in league with anyone in the murder of Oswald.

There is no evidence that Ruby and Oswald knew each other, or that Ruby and Police Officer J. D. Tippit, also slain by Oswald, knew each other.

These are the principal conclusions of the Warren Commission in its investigation of the role played by the self-appointed avenger of the President.

The commission traced Jack Ruby's movements from birth until the moment he pulled the trigger in the basement of the Dallas Police Department, killing Oswald as millions of television viewers looked on.

Ruby's Two Stories

Actually there are two stories, allotted equal space in the commission's report. The first is the Ruby story dating from his miserable beginning in Chicago to Nov. 21, 1963. The second is a detailed review of the frenzied three days preceding the shooting of Oswald.

In reality, the minute-by-minute resume of the fateful three days is a logical microscopic climax to a life which for 53 years had been rushing toward some kind of disaster — a weird, schizophrenic life full of frustrations, half-filled ambitions and unattainable goals.

On the eve of the Kennedy assassination, Jack Ruby was a man deeply in debt to the Government, to his brothers and friends, still the "hustler" he grew up to be in the Chicago ghettos; a man savage with his fists or generous with his money, as the fancy struck him; a publicity-hungry operator of two nightclubs.

Relatively Peaceful

Thursday, Nov. 21, was a relatively quiet day for Jack Ruby. He talked with an attorney about his tax troubles, he conferred about a peace bond brought on by a fight with one of his strip-tease dancers, and he looked in on his Carousel and Vegas night clubs, acting as master of ceremonies for awhile and kicking out one unruly customer. Nothing out of the ordinary.



Television viewers the world over saw Ruby pull the trigger. Oswald died a few hours later in the same hospital as the President.

Friday morning found him at the Dallas Morning News office arranging for advertising and complaining about his clubs' financial condition.

Ruby also became excited about a right-wing, black-bordered ad in the paper, highly critical of President Kennedy and bearing the name Bernard Weissman. This ad and similar propaganda was to torment Ruby for the next few days. He seemed to think they were somehow linked with the assassination.

"Stunned Disbelief"

Then the news that Mr. Kennedy was shot raced through the office. Ruby responded with a look of "stunned disbelief" . . . He was "obviously shaken, and an ashen color — just very pale . . ."

From that point on, Ruby appeared to be in a constant turmoil.

"I left the building and I went down and I got in my car and I couldn't stop crying . . ." he told the commission.

A newspaper man said he saw Ruby at Parkland Hospital where the President was taken. The commission is convinced this was not so. Ruby went on to his Carousel Club and began a series of disjointed, inarticu-

late phone calls to relatives, friends, an old girl friend. Sometimes he sobbed.

Closed for the Week End

He decided to close his nightclubs for the weekend. He told his sister, Eva Grant, who operated the Vegas Club: "I never felt so bad in my life, even when Ma or Pa died."

Jack Ruby, the exuberant extrovert who knew more policemen and newspaper men than anybody, was right in the thick of it when Lee Harvey Oswald was presented to newsmen in a midnight press conference. Later he said he was "carried away with the excitement of history."

And there he was, calling "Hi Henry," to District Attorney Wade, distributing business cards to the Carousel Club, gabbing with the cops, arranging telephone interviews for radio stations and newsmen with District Attorney Wade, and later dropping in on radio station KLIF with an armload of sandwiches and soft drinks.

Ad Kept Troubling Him

But that anti-Kennedy ad in the Dallas paper kept bothering Ruby. At 4:30 a.m. Saturday he awakened his roommate,

George Senator, and got in touch with Larry Crafard, his handyman at the Carousel Club.

They met at a billboard near the Carousel which read: "Impeach Earl Warren," Ruby thought there was a tie-up between it and the newspaper ad.

"This is the work of the John Birch Society or the Communist Party or maybe a combination of both," Ruby told Senator.

Saturday passed by in a blur of activity: Many phone calls, more visits to police headquarters "acting like a reporter," and more torment over that newspaper ad. Was this the work of a group stirring up anti-Semitic feelings in Dallas? He finally got to bed about 1.30 a.m.

Arose Before 9

Sunday morning Ruby arose before 9, his roommate recalled. Characteristically a neat dresser, he shaved and donned a business suit.

Then, said Senator, he paced "the floor from the living room to the bedroom, from the bedroom to the living room, and his lips were going. What he was jabbering I don't know. But he was really pacing."

How did Ruby feel that fateful Sunday morning? Here is how he described his feelings to the Warren Commission:

"Sunday morning. . . I saw a letter to Caroline, two columns about a 16-inch area. Someone had written a letter to Caroline. The most heartbreaking letter. I don't remember the contents. . . . Alongside that letter on the same sheet of paper was a small comment in the newspaper that, I don't know how it was stated, that Mrs. Kennedy may have to come back for the trial of Lee Harvey Oswald. . . ."

"I Don't Know . . ."

"I don't know what bug got ahold of me. I don't know what it is, but I am going to tell the truth word for word."

"I am taking a pill called Preludin. It is a harmless pill, and it is very easy to get in the drugstore. It isn't a highly prescribed pill. I use it for dieting."

"I don't partake of that much food. I think that was a stimulus to give me an emotional feeling that suddenly I felt, which was so stupid, that I wanted to show my love for our faith, being of the Jewish faith, and I never used the term and I don't want to go into that—suddenly the feeling, the emotional feeling came within me that someone owed this debt to our beloved President to save her the ordeal of coming back. I don't know why that came through my mind."

That is when, Jack Ruby says, he decided to kill Lee Harvey Oswald.

At 11 a.m. that Sunday, Ruby left home. He had a revolver. He also had \$3,000, but that was not unusual. He did most of his business out of the trunk of his car. His bank accounts were insignificant (\$275 to \$500).

He dropped off at a Western Union office, one block from the Police and Courts Building, and sent \$25 to a striptease dancer, Karen Carlin, and walked out.

How He Entered

The Warren Commission went to great pains to learn how Ruby entered the basement for his rendezvous with Oswald. After sifting all the evidence, the commission wrote:

"Although the evidence on Ruby's means of entry is not conclusive, the weight of the evidence indicates that he walked down the ramp leading from Main St. to the basement of the police department."

"Video tapes taken without interruption before the shooting establish that Lt. Pierce's car (which would assist in Oswald's transfer) cleared the crowd at the foot of the ramp 55 seconds before the shooting," the report read. "they also show Ruby standing at the foot of the ramp on the Main St. side before the shooting."

Ruby-Oswald Relationship

Many persons came forward to suggest that Ruby and Oswald knew each other, thereby suggesting that Ruby's act was the final stroke of a conspiracy.

The commission went to great length to debunk any such relationship. It said television tapes did not bear out the contention of some that Oswald appeared to recognize Ruby when he stepped toward him.

The commission further systematically discounted stories that Ruby and Oswald had been seen together at the Carousel, or that they might have met at a restaurant both patronized (at different times of the day), or that there was something sinister about both having post office boxes at the same post office.

Another rumor squelched by the hearing was that both Ruby and Oswald were homosexuals and might have known each other.

Conspiratorial Motive

In a careful study of Ruby's background, the commission could find no motive to link him with a conspiracy.

His completely disorganized financial records reflected no suspicious activities. Besides substantial debts to brothers and friends, the United States government was claiming \$44,000 in delinquent taxes.

An avowed Democrat with slight political interest, there was no information to link him with Communist or other radical causes. If as a young man in Chicago he participated in physical attacks on German-American Bund meetings, it was more for ethnic than political reasons.

Mixed Up Early

Jack Ruby's life was mixed up from the outset. Various records list no fewer than seven birthdates, all in 1911.

He was the fifth of the eight living children of Joseph and Fannie Rubenstein, both born in Poland. Joseph Rubenstein was a hard-drinking carpenter who was unemployed the last 30 years of his life. He and his wife quarreled and fought until they separated in 1921.

Young Jack did not remain in this environment past his 10th birthday. He sullenly went through juvenile and foster homes, getting along neither with adults nor children. Finally he returned to what had passed for a home, now more morbid than ever because of his mother's mental disease.

Even so, the report says, toward the end of his mother's life, Jack became fond of her.

Little Education

Jack Ruby's education was as pitiful as his home life. He staggered through the eighth grade at the age of 16, and that was it.

He won his spurs as a hustler on Chicago's streets at an early age, scalping tickets and selling novelties and knickknacks. He got through that youthful period with few brushes with the law. In 1933 he moved to Los Angeles, then San Francisco.

All this while, the young man's Jekyll-Hyde character baffled all who knew him. Some found him "clean-cut, honest, well-mannered and soft-spoken." He sold tip-sheets at race tracks and told his boss he would like to become a policeman if he had been larger.

Reputation With Fists

Returning to Chicago in 1937, Jack Ruby resumed the life of a hustler and regained a reputation for having explosive fists. Except for his personal fights, his three years in the Air Force were uneventful. After the war he joined his brothers in an unsuccessful manufacturing enterprise, and in 1947, moved to Dallas.

If Ruby's life had been stormy before, it became truly tempestuous now. He constantly was up to his ears in debt and trouble in his nightclub enterprises.

His rough stuff with employees, customers and anyone he took offense at would fill a book. Between 1949 and 1963 he was arrested eight times.

The commission noted that he was his own unofficial club bouncer. "On about 15 occasions since 1950, he beat with his fists, pistol whipped, or black-jacked patrons who became unruly."

Often Remorseful

After these escapades, Ruby often was remorseful and apologized. Strangely, many of the victims made up and resumed cordial relations with him. When the generous side came out, he could not do enough for a person.

In the months before the assassination, things generally appeared to be worsening for Ruby. His tax troubles and license problems mounted. He was constantly dickering with the government for tax settlements. His business was going down hill.

It was a black world for this mixed-up man the day President Kennedy rode into town. It was a world that would never be right again.