

# Jack Ruby, 21 Months Later: 'He's Doing Fine'

By JIM LEHRER, Staff Writer

It probably would cost Jack Ruby \$18 a day for the same pad at a downtown hotel.

His is a private room. The motif is pastel green. He has his own bathroom facilities, except for a shower. His meals are brought to him. Both daily papers are delivered to his door. His sheets are changed every day. The management even furnishes his clothes.

"Don't worry about Jack Ruby," says Sheriff Bill Decker. "The boy's doing fine."

**RUBY HAS BEEN CONFINED** in Sheriff Decker's Dallas County jail since Nov. 25, 1963, the day after the former nightclub owner shot and killed Lee Harvey Oswald, accused assassin of President Kennedy, in the basement of Dallas City Hall.

Except for trips out for psychiatric tests and court appearances, Ruby has spent all of his waking and sleeping moments since then in a small area comparable in size to an average-size house trailer.

It has been 21 months of reading, writing letters, talking on the phone, playing cards and limited conversation for the man who is under a death sentence for the Oswald murder.

**AFTER THE 1963 SHOOTING** and during and immediately after his trial in February-March 1964, the newspapers and magazines of the world were full of Ruby and his limited doings. Reporters speaking in a wide variety of accents sought every scrap of information they could find about the kind of toothpaste he used, his eating and reading habits, his daily routine—anything.

Slowly this interest died and people began to get used to Jack Ruby, one of the most infamous prisoners of all times, being in jail.

Ruby, according to Sheriff Decker, has also adjusted.

He has, in other words, become routine. The public, Sheriff Decker and his men and Ruby himself have all accepted the fact that this first 21 months is only the beginning. Ruby's presence has become as much a part of the courthouse and its environs as J. C. Kaiser's food and coffee stand in the lobby of the Criminal Courts Building.

"We've gotten used to him and he's gotten used to us," is the way the sheriff puts it.

**RUBY'S LIVING QUARTERS** are in a cell originally designed to house three prisoners but converted to one-man use. Mr. Decker won't say what floor it's on.

It measures approximately 18 feet in width and is 45 feet long. At one end is a wash basin and a commode and a shower that doesn't work. There is a small steel cot for sleeping.

"Every morning an attendant takes him down the corridor on the other side of the floor for a shower," Sheriff Decker explains. No other prisoners are allowed in the community-type shower when Ruby is there.

Ruby is a late sleeper. He seldom eats breakfast. He shaves with a safety razor in his cell daily.

There is a view from his green-walled home, but it's through bars and screens to the jail floor below—not to the outside.

"He can see other prisoners and they can see him," says the sheriff, "but they're not close enough to talk to each other."

**RUBY DOES HIS TALKING** to guards who still remain nearby 24 hours a day, and on the telephone to friends and relatives. Sheriff Decker also comes by, usually once a week, for a chat with his prominent prisoner.



Jack Ruby . . . "the boy's doing fine."

The guard, which changes on a regular rotation-shift basis, is there to make sure Ruby doesn't try to commit suicide, something he's tried before. Sheriff Decker indicates that this special duty man probably will remain there, too, as long as Ruby does.

In addition to his deputy-shadow, Ruby also has immediate access to the chief jailer and other jail officials whose office opens into his cell at one end.

Theoretically, lights go out at the jail at 10 p.m., but Ruby has a special deal on this.

"If he wants to stay up and play cards or talk with one of the jailers or his attendant we let him do it," Sheriff Decker says.

**RUBY SPENDS** a lot of time playing cards—rummy, hearts and other games—both at night and during the day. Mr. Decker didn't say whether Ruby is usually the winner or the loser.

He reads both Dallas papers usually every day and also several magazines, including *Life* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. He also reads a lot of books. So many were sent to him or brought to him by relatives, in fact, that the sheriff finally had to order them taken out.

"It was creating a fire hazard," Sheriff Decker explains. "We still allow him to have books, of course, but we try to keep the number within bounds."



Sheriff Decker says Ruby's reading habits cover just about everything, but declined to name any book titles.

"I'm not about to get something started on that," he says.

**RUBY'S FIRST LOVE** is the telephone. The sheriff says, in fact, his desire to use it more is Ruby's main complaint.

"We have so many prisoners and just so many telephones," he says. "He gets to make his share of the calls just like everyone else."

The phones are the pay type, and require a dime to use. Prisoners—including Ruby—are not allowed to have money in the jail, but dimes can be obtained from the jailers in exchange for the regular jail script to make phone calls.

Who does Ruby call? Relatives mostly, says the sheriff. Many of the calls are long distance—collect.

**RUBY WRITES** a lot of letters, also to relatives and friends. The sheriff says that he is not writing a book or a magazine story or anything else of that nature. The only time he did this was when he first came to the jail and wrote out some notes that were later made a part of a widely publicized newspaper series.

Sheriff Decker still closely scrutinizes all of Ruby's outgoing and incoming mail. His mail is specially handled and censored apart from the rest of the jail mail.

"I would estimate that he gets only from 25 to 30 letters a week now," says the sheriff, "compared to hundreds and thousands when this all first began."

**THERE HAS BEEN** no change in the rigid regulations governing Ruby's visitors. Only his family, his rabbi, attorneys and other people of similar relationships are allowed.

Mrs. Eva Grant, Ruby's sister, and his Dallas brother, Earl Ruby, are his most frequent visitors. One or both of them come by the jail at least once or twice every week.

A special arrangement exists for Ruby in this regard. His visitors do not have to conform to the specific hours and days that bind the other prisoners. They talk to Ruby through an individual visitation screen, also, away from the other prisoners.

Ruby wears the white cover-all "uniform" of the county jail prisoner which is furnished and laundered by the county. He is also allowed a full set of civilian clothes, which in Ruby's case is one dark blue suit, two white shirts, one tie and extra sets of socks and underwear.

**DESPITE AN OCCASIONAL** past news story to the contrary, Ruby is losing neither pounds nor his hair.

"He is a good eater," says the sheriff. "He doesn't eat breakfast—never has, I understand. But he eats well at both lunch and supper. He weighs within at least four or five pounds of what he did when he came in here."

His fare, incidentally, is the same food served to every other prisoner in the Dallas County jail. He does not go to the galley for his meals. They are brought to him in his cell on a tin tray, as they are to most of the other prisoners.

His personal guard sits close by and watches every bite. The metal tray and utensils are gathered up immediately after he is finished.

**RUBY REPORTEDLY** has a fixation about his hair. He's almost bald and wishes it wasn't so. For awhile he used a special salve on his head which was supposed to keep his hair from falling out.

"He's quit using it now," Sheriff Decker says. "But I am happy to report that he still has the three hairs across the top of his head he had when he came in."

Ruby is physically healthy, too, according to Sheriff Decker.

"Outside of an aspirin maybe, he's never been given any medicine, nor asked for a doctor," he said. The county and assistant county medical officers are in the jail daily, if anything is needed.

**WHAT DOES JACK RUBY** think about? No definitive answer is available, but from the many conversations he's had with Sheriff Decker it appears his main thoughts are still on himself.

"We'll usually talk about some new development in his case," recounts the sheriff. "I remember some conversation about the Warren Report."

The sheriff said it is probable that Ruby discusses other things with his close-by guard or jailers, but he said he has never heard Ruby once mention the war in Viet Nam, for instance, or any other outside event or circumstance.

**THE FUTURE** for Jack Ruby is uncertain. His death sentence conviction is on appeal. A sanity hearing is scheduled for September. There will undoubtedly be countless more hearings on a wide variety of issues.

This could take years and probably will. Some estimates say it will be at least two years before the final round of the first appeal will be completed.

So whether Ruby is eventually electrocuted, tried again, sent to a mental institution or turned loose, he still faces many more days in his 18-by-45 room.

The longest any prisoner has ever stayed continuously in the Dallas County Jail was eight years. Dewey Hunt set that record back in the 1930s before he was finally executed for the murder of a Dallas streetcar man.

Ruby has six years to go to even be in the running to break that record.

"But no matter how long it is, nobody has to worry about him," says Sheriff Decker. "We're taking good care of Jack Ruby."