

# JACK RUBY AND HIS JAIL DOCTORS

A strange diagnosis, a familiar hospital, another death

A SPECIAL REPORT BY DAVID WELSH

When Jack Ruby was admitted to Parkland Hospital on December 9, his illness had been variously diagnosed as a "bad cold" (Jail Doctor John W. Callahan), "coronary occlusion" (Dr. J. M. Pickard, county health officer), and "pneumonia" (initial diagnosis of doctors at Parkland).

Then doctors found malignant cells in a lymph node and in the lining of the lung. More than four quarts of mucous fluid were pumped from Ruby's chest the day after he was admitted.

Less than a month later he was dead.

The autopsy examiner said the cause of death was a massive blood clot in the lung, with cancer a contributing cause. He added that the clot, which had formed in Ruby's leg and moved up through the heart to lodge in the lung, probably would have killed him even if he had not been weakened by cancer.

Ruby's sister Eva and Texas editor Penn Jones Jr. implied that his cancer might conceivably have been induced. Skeptical, the Sunday Ramparts consulted a number of specialists about this possibility. Some said it was possible to introduce cancerous cells into a person's body and have it "take"; others said it was extremely unlikely or impossible. One doctor said he knew of cases of long term prisoners volunteering to be guinea pigs for cancer serum injections, in exchange for money or early release from prison. "To them, it's a particularly macabre form of Russian roulette," he said, "and they have the satisfaction of doing something for the betterment of mankind."

Another physician confirmed that cancer serum had been administered to prison volunteers, but that none of the subjects, to his knowledge, had so far contracted the disease. One pathologist speculated that Ruby might possibly have had a pre-existing cancer condition, and that the medical records had been either misplaced or destroyed.

Whatever else may be said, and although certain types of cancer do spread quickly, it is a wonder that it could have reached such an advanced stage without being detected earlier.

Ruby's sister, Mrs. Eva Grant, visited Jack in the jail before he was transferred to Parkland Hospital. "He looked terrible," she said, "like a corpse. For three weeks he's been deathly sick in that jail."

Ruby might not have been taken

alive to the hospital at all if he himself had not demanded an x-ray.

Dr. Pickard, who has overall responsibility for the prisoners' health, told the Sunday Ramparts: "Yes, it was Jack that asked for that x-ray, and so we decided to send him to Parkland to get one. I don't think he'd been x-rayed in quite a while. I hadn't seen him in quite some time, not since '64, my records show. I noticed a marked change. He looked sick to me."

Dr. Callahan had been Ruby's jail doctor since October 1965. He said in an interview that his predecessor, Dr. Julian Murdock, who is now the substitute jail doctor, and Dr. Pickard "looked in on Jack occasionally, although mostly they'd go by what I said about him." To Callahan's knowledge, he, Murdock and Pickard were the only doctors to visit Ruby in jail since October 1965—which raises doubt, incidentally, about Pickard's statement that he had not seen Ruby since '64. Callahan also said that during his time as jail doctor, no x-ray was administered to Ruby by anyone.

Callahan said Ruby first began coughing and vomiting at about the time his murder conviction was reversed last October. He said the patient had another coughing spell early in November and complained of chest pains. The diagnosis: "I thought perhaps he had strained a chest muscle." The treatment: "I gave him antibiotics and kept him in bed for two days; his condition seemed to return to normal." Ruby was still being treated for a dry cough when he was trundled off to the hospital, critically ill with cancer.

Dr. Callahan was one of the few persons to pay frequent visits to Ruby at the county jail. And he emphatically disagreed with those of Ruby's lawyers who contended that their client was insane.

"Jack always struck me as a sane, level-headed person," Callahan said, "although he tended to be suspicious, especially of officials and doctors. Up until the sanity hearing last June, he was very suspicious of me: I think he thought that I was a psychiatrist trying to get something on him. I'd come up to his cell and he'd say to the guard, 'Who's that guy?' and the guard would pretend not to know. And Ruby would say, 'Well, don't let him in here.'"

"Of course he had his on days and his off days," Callahan related. "One day he would be exuberant as all get-out and the next day he would mope around. He

was always talking about the persecution of the Jews. He thought it was the end for the Jews: Armageddon was close. You'd say, 'Why, that's ridiculous. What are you, some kind of nut?' And he'd say, 'No, this is a black day for the Jews.' He just said that to get you stirred up, something to talk about, and he'd belittle whoever he was talking to, to get your attention. He's as sane as you and me. The rest is just exhibitionism, because he wants to say something inflammatory."

Other observers of Ruby in jail, including his one-time attorney, Melvin Belli, would disagree that Ruby's frequent and wild statements about mass persecution of the Jews were "just exhibitionism." Belli said in an interview last month that Ruby "very definitely had been told of a pogrom against the Jews, and told over and over again until he believed it."

Ruby's cell was in the middle of the sixth floor mezzanine. Dr. Callahan said that a guard was always in the cell with him and that another was posted outside.

"The prisoners all called him Jack," the doctor said. "Sometimes I would take him down the steel steps to the shower on the floor below, and he'd stop and talk to the prisoners along the way."

"He liked to write things down, and read. I know he read Attorney Belli's book on his trip to Russia, and *The Carpetbaggers*. He was also a health faddist, exercised a lot, and, as far as food goes, he could order just about what he wanted, like special fruit juices. But he was not a hypochondriac."

"He kept trying to justify his shooting of Oswald: he did that to almost everybody. He didn't think much of Oswald, I gather; he thought Oswald was the scum of the earth. He kept talking about how he couldn't bear to see Jackie Kennedy suffer, if she had to come back to Oswald's trial . . ."

Jack Ruby died protesting his innocence of any involvement in the Kennedy assassination, but insisting at the same time that the full story of why he killed Lee Harvey Oswald has not been told. And now, with Ruby's death at Parkland Hospital, there are more unanswered questions about the curious man who shot and killed the accused assassin of President Kennedy.

Mr. Welch has covered the assassination controversy for Ramparts magazine.