

THERE IT WAS, Parkland Hospital in Dallas, way station to the morgue for the known principals in the Kennedy assassination drama: where John F. Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald were pronounced dead and where, last month, Jack Ruby died of a massive blood clot.

His sister, Mrs. Eva Grant, was there on December 10, the day after Ruby was transferred to the hospital from jail; suspicion crackled in her voice as she told reporters, "I'm going to call somebody from Washington to see what made Jack sick." She charged that Ruby had received improper treatment at the county jail.

Ruby, too, was suspicious about his forthcoming death. He expected to be killed because he was a Jew, because he knew something he hadn't told, because he thought people were accusing him of playing a part in the Kennedy assassination. In a letter smuggled out of his cell in the Dallas jail (excerpts of which follow this article), he wrote:

Now, I know my time is running out. . . . they plan me doing away with. . . . Supposing I prove to be right about not being here much longer. . . . I'm going to die a horrible death anyway. . . .

He wasn't talking about an official execution, because at the same time he was saying that his conviction for the murder of Oswald would be reversed, and no one expected a death penalty at a second trial. As clearly as the letter shows anything, it shows that he expected to die because of what he knew, or what he was thought to have done, or as part of a pogrom; but though he clearly feared these things, we may never know why.

He was always sensitive about being a Jew. A child of Chicago's Jewish ghetto, with an alcoholic father and a mother who went mad, Ruby took to the streets early, ran with the gangs and acquired the skills of the grifter and the street brawler. They called him "Sparky," for his volatility. He was a union organizer; he sold punchboards and busts of FDR, scalped tickets to sporting events, pushed racetrack tip sheets. And with friends, he used to disrupt German-American Bund meetings—occasionally cracking a few heads in the process—and was later notorious in the Army Air Corps for his readiness to respond with his fists to any slighting remark about the Jews.

In 1947 he came to Dallas, where he operated a succession of night clubs over the next 16 years, and his last club, the Carousel, was a hangout for his many friends in the Dallas police department (including Officer J. D. Tip-pit). His letter from jail lists several Dallas police figures as men to be trusted. At the same time, he seems to have moved easily among underworld figures.

Ruby could play the clown, to perfection. On the evening of Kennedy's assassination Ruby stood on a table in the police station, making notes during Oswald's im-

promptu "press conference." Asked what he was doing there, Ruby replied, "Translating for a Jewish newspaper."

But if he could be a clown, he was no fool. No one who has read how skillfully Ruby handled the questions of Earl Warren and Congressman Gerald Ford would contend, as some of his lawyers did, that Ruby had lost touch with reality. He led his questioners like sheep, according to his whims, telling them what he wanted to tell them and very little more.

RUBY WASN'T ALL "CON." He could be sincere, or impressionable, or pathetic, or wildly violent. He was known to have brutally beaten with his fists, pistol whipped, blackjacked, brass-knuckled, or hurled down stairs at least 15 persons during his stay in Dallas, escaping conviction each time. On the other hand, his affection for his dog Sheba was legendary, and friends noticed his extraordinary generosity, particularly toward persons in distress. You could always hit Jack for a little pocket money if you were short, and if you needed sympathy, Jack would as likely as not burst into tears.

Apart from petty crimes of violence, illegal liquor sales and pimping, Ruby periodically performed services for the minions of organized crime. A nonsmoking teetotaler who didn't gamble, Ruby knew a number of gamblers, pushers and strong-arm men. He was reported to have served as a contact man in the narcotics trade with Mexico, and as a go-between in a deal to run arms to anti-Castro elements in Cuba. In another episode, in 1959, he contacted a Texan reputed to be a friend of Castro's, and offered \$5000 each for the release of three persons in Castro's custody. The money, he said, would come "from Las Vegas."

Jack Ruby never got rich; in fact, he seems to have been constantly in debt. Because of tax difficulties, he habitually carried quantities of cash on his person and in the trunk of his car, and kept more in his apartment. Until the assassination, his friendship with police officers—though it was of value to him in his own dealings—seems to have been motivated as much by a desire to be close to the "action" as by the chance for financial profit.

Once the tragic November weekend had passed, Ruby's speech and writing were dominated by three themes: his fear of being eliminated *in Dallas*, his insistence that he could only tell the whole truth in some other location, and his obsession with an international plot against the Jews. These themes run through the rambling letter from his cell:

Don't believe the Warren Report. That was only put out to make me look innocent, so that it would throw the Americans and all the European countries off guard. And in the jail interrogation room, talking with attorney Mel Belli, Ruby suddenly burst out:

What are we doing, Mel, kidding ourselves? We

know I did it for Jackie and the kids. I just went in and shot him. They've got us anyway.

No one connected with the case seriously believed the story about assassinating Oswald so that "Jackie and the kids" would not have to come back for Oswald's trial. In his early FBI interviews, Ruby never mentioned that motive, and Belli thinks that Ruby seized on it later when someone else suggested it to him.

When Ruby talked to the Warren Commission, there were two representatives of the state of Texas present, as well as an assistant district attorney, a Secret Service agent, the local sheriff, and Ruby's Texas attorney, Joe Tonahill. Ruby trusted none of them, including Tonahill. He testified:

The only thing I want to get out to the public, and I can't say it here, is with authenticity, with sincerity of the truth of everything and why my act was committed, but it can't be said here. It can be said, it's got to be said amongst people of the highest authority . . .

The names of confederates in the killing of Oswald? The plot against the Jews? "Unless you get me to Washington," Ruby said, "you can't get a fair shake out of me." Earl Warren refused to consider Ruby's request.

"He was always talking about the persecution of the Jews," said jail doctor John W. Callahan. "He thought it was the end for the Jews. Armageddon was close. He'd say, 'This is a black day for the Jews.'"

Ruby was profoundly disturbed, not only by Kennedy's death but by the fact that the anti-Kennedy ad in The Dallas Morning News of November 22 was signed with an apparently Jewish name: Bernard Weissman. No one who knew Ruby thought his sudden concern with a right wing threat was an act, despite his consummate acting abilities and the fact that during his past he would have played ball with a right-winger as soon as with anyone else.

At 4:30 a.m. on November 23, Ruby and two friends went out to photograph an "Impeach Earl Warren" billboard which had been in place for months, and then went to the post office, where Ruby looked into the numbered box listed in the ad for Bernard Weissman. He was visibly distressed when he saw how much mail was in it. Later, in jail, Ruby contended that the John Birch Society was falsely accusing him of helping in the assassination—a pretext for exterminating Jews. He testified:

I am being victimized as part of a plot. . . . At this moment Lee Harvey Oswald isn't guilty of committing the crime of assassinating President Kennedy. Jack Ruby is. How can I fight that, Chief Justice Warren?

Although to a non-professional, Ruby's letter certainly seems to show evidence of paranoia, no one ever diagnosed his troubles that way. Professor Thomas Fiddick

offered the explanation that "given the extreme anti-Semitism in Dallas, there was a basis in reality for Ruby's fears: *an actual pogrom was threatened in order to silence Ruby.*" Attorney Mel Belli agreed in an interview last Christmas that Ruby "very definitely had been told about a pogrom against the Jews, and told over and over again until he believed it."

TAKE A CURIOUS, pathetic, violent, unstable man, feisty and belligerent all his life about his Jewish background. Give him a close association for over a decade with law enforcement officers in Dallas, so that even among the delusions of his letter from jail these officers outweigh the list of men "you can trust." Add the constant, frantic insistence that there is another, greater story which cannot be told in Dallas; the fear for his own life; his conviction of a worldwide plot against the Jews, tied to his own role in killing Oswald which observers insist is an idea that must somehow have been planted. Do these elements somehow, fantastically, make a pattern?

They may provide a possible, if astonishing, explanation. But now Jack Ruby is dead, and we have only such strange historical keys as this letter to help us to an eventual understanding of the story of his murder of Lee Harvey Oswald.

The letter which follows is one of two unsigned letters, handwritten in pencil on slips from a memo pad, confiscated by one of Ruby's guards and subsequently smuggled from the jail. They were sold at auction in the Astor Gallery in New York on January 31, 1966, by Charles Hamilton, a reputable autograph dealer who vouched for their authenticity. The purchaser of this one was Texas editor Penn Jones Jr., author of the book *Forgive My Grief*; he paid \$950. Ruby's younger brother Sam immediately contacted Jones, and confirmed that Ruby had admitted writing the letter.

With Jones' permission, we are publishing most of the letter (33 pages in its original handwritten form). This is its exclusive publication, and it is presented as Ruby wrote it, without correcting his errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation, without attempting to clarify its ambiguities, contradictions and evident factual errors. It will be remembered that Ruby never went beyond the eighth grade in school.—by David Welsh

Ramparts is publishing Jack Ruby's letter as an intriguing historical document, which might provide some insight into Ruby's mind during his time in jail. The editors do not endorse any of the statements in Ruby's letter, many of which are demonstrably inaccurate and untrue.

Most of the names mentioned in the letter have been deleted, in order to avoid injury to the persons named.

The Letter:

JOHN,

You must believe what I am about to write to you, and after you have read the contents, try to remember everything, and then destroy same, and whatever you do don't take anyone in your confidence, except the names of the people that I will enclose here, and these try to remember them by going over their names constantly until you are sure that you will remember them.

First, you must realize that the people here want everyone to think I am crazy, so if what I know is actually, and then no one will believe me, because of my supposed insanity.

Now, I know that my time is running out, and that the most that I'll be here will be two or three days more, and they plan me doing away with.

Don't let the smiles etc of the guards fool you.

Supposing I prove to be right about not being here much longer then you will have to believe everything else I'm going to tell you. You have watched my behavior and my actions for some time now, and certainly you have come to the conclusion that I am normal, otherwise you wouldn't have been as kind to me as you have been. So you must make up your mind as to what you think of me.

If you have up to now thought of me as nice person and a very sincere person, then you must believe me that I know what is taking place, and so please with all my heart, you must believe me, because I am counting on you to save this country a lot of blood-shed.

As soon as you get out you must read Texas looks at Lyndon, and it may open your eyes to a lot of things, This man is a NAZI in the worst order.

For over a year now they have been doing away with my people of course you don't read about these things in the paper, they have means and ways of keeping it secret. But supposing you find out when you are released that all of the Jews have been done away with, and after telling you so far in advance, which proves that I must have some knowledge of what is going on . . .

Here is what happened and how I am responsible for this terrible tragedy. To start of with, don't believe the Warren report, that was only put out to make me look innocent, so that it would throw the Americans and all

the European country's off guard.

They have found a means and ways to frame me, by deception etc., and they have succeeded in same. _____ were in on it.

Now this is how they did it. They had a guard with me constantly, and this one guard in particular by name of _____ was well versed in the bible, and he started to work on me with the bible routine, and on his person unbeknownst to me he had one of the these wireless speakers, which is very small, and he kept it in his trousers pockets. Everything I said was transmitted into this tiny mike and taken on a taperecorder in another room. Now everything that may incriminating against me they would leave on the recorder, and anything I said that would prove me innocent they would erase from the recorder.

Here is what happened one nite. I was in a very delirious mood of what had transpired in the courtroom that day. That when I had gone back to my cell and had tried to sleep without talking to the guard, and I was very low and crying, and the guard knew I at my lowest, because _____ had told him so. The guard knew I was vulnerable to almost anything. He blurted out Jack aren't you talking to me tonite, and I came to where he was sitting and I fell to the floor and broke down and said that I had sent guns to Cuba, which I had incriminated myself innocently. Now I never did send guns to Cuba. I only built up a guilt complex.

What happened was that a friend of mine by name of _____ called from Havana, Cuba in 1959, that was during peace relations with Cuba, and we really hadn't found out what kind of person Castro was. What this _____ wanted me to do was to call _____

_____ and _____ wanted him to send four Cobra pistols to him, and all I did was to relay the message _____ wanted these guns, because he was managing the gambling casino and wanted some protection for himself his wife and the owners, and that was all I had to do with it . . .

I had blurted out to the guard "that I sent guns to Cuba" which had been played back on a recorder. This and other things that I could have said innocently