

## WALTER CRONKITE – IMAGE #29

On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was fatally shot while riding in an open-car motorcade through the streets of downtown Dallas, Texas. Less than an hour after that shooting, Lee Harvey Oswald killed J. D. Tippit, a Dallas policeman who questioned him on the street. Thirty minutes after that, Oswald was arrested in a movie theatre by police. Oswald, a 24-year old loner, was formally arraigned on November 23<sup>rd</sup> for both murders.

On November 24<sup>th</sup> Dallas police were transferring Oswald from one jail to another. He was brought to the basement garage of the Dallas police headquarters ostensibly on his way to a more secure county jail. A crowd of police and press, with live television cameras rolling, gathered to witness his departure. The time was 12:20 p.m. CST. As Oswald was led out and about to be placed in a police car, Jack Ruby emerged from the crowd and fatally wounded him with a single shot from a concealed .38 revolver. The entire incident was captured on live television, shocking viewers across the country who witnessed the crime.

Ruby was immediately detained in police custody. Because the killing of Oswald destroyed the chance to hear any testimony that he might have provided, floodgates of speculation opened up concerning the assassination of President Kennedy. Furthermore, questions arose about Ruby. Who was he? How did he get into the Dallas Police Department basement headquarters with a gun? Why did he do it? Was it because, as Ruby originally stated, he wanted to spare the widow of President Kennedy the agony of testifying against the man accused of killing her husband? Or was Ruby part of a conspiracy?

This much is known. Ruby was born Jacob Rubenstein in Chicago in 1911. He had moved to Dallas in 1947 and operated a series of nightclubs, dance halls, and strip joints. At the time of the assassination, he owned the Carousel Club in downtown Dallas and the Vegas Club in the city's Oak Lawn district.

Because of Ruby's years in the netherworld of Dallas' nightlife, allegations arose that he had minor connections with organized-crime figures. Later on, however, the Warren Commission and the House Select Committee on Assassinations both concluded that he was not involved in mob activities.

On the other side of the law, Ruby had no shortage of friends on the police force. His relationships with them amounted to various favors being given to police in exchange for leniency in their monitoring of his establishments. The police were treated royally when they visited his clubs. One officer even called Ruby by name as the nightclub owner stepped forward to pull the trigger when he shot Oswald.

**On the night of the assassination of President Kennedy, Ruby had stood in the middle of a group of reporters at a news conference at Dallas Police headquarters. According to an FBI report, Ruby told agents that he was carrying a loaded snub-nosed Colt Cobra .38 revolver in his right-hand pocket that night.**

**He was toting the weapon again two days later as he made his way into the basement of police headquarters – just as officers were getting ready to transfer Oswald from the building to the county jail. Even though Ruby may have counted on his friendships with police officers to be able to gain access to that part of the building, he apparently did not need to do so. In its report, the House Select Committee on Assassinations later said it was “troubled by the apparently unlocked doors along the stairway route and the removal of security guards from the area of the garage nearest the stairway shortly before the shooting.”**

**Some people called Ruby a hero. Nonetheless, he was charged with first-degree murder for killing Oswald. After his incarceration Ruby claimed that rage at the murder of President Kennedy was the sole motive for his action. Many believed and still believe that Ruby killed Oswald to keep him from revealing a larger assassination conspiracy. Ruby denied the allegation and pleaded innocent on the grounds that his great grief over Kennedy’s murder had caused him to suffer “psychomotor epilepsy” and shoot Oswald unconsciously.**

**On March 14, 1964, the jury found Ruby guilty of the murder of Oswald “with malice” and sentenced him to death. His attorneys appealed the verdict, saying that their client never could have received a fair trial in Dallas and that procedural errors had occurred during the trial.**

**At an appeal hearing on September 9, 1965, in Dallas, Ruby passed a note to his attorney, Elmer Gertz, that read: “Elmer, you must believe me, that I am not imagining crazy thoughts, etc. This is all so hopeless, that they have everything in the bag and there isn’t any chance of hope for me. These hearings are just stalling for time.” The note shows Ruby’s declining mental state.**

**In October, 1966, however, the Texas Court of Appeals reversed the decision on the grounds of improper admission of testimony and the fact that Ruby could not have received a fair trial in Dallas at the time. Arrangements were under way for a new trial in Wichita Falls, Texas, when Ruby, who had been treated for lung cancer, died of a pulmonary embolism in a Dallas hospital on January 3, 1967. He was 55 years old.**

**After President Kennedy was killed, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson succeeded him as President. Johnson appointed the President’s Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy. This commission was chaired by Earl Warren, the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. It investigated circumstances surrounding the shootings of Kennedy and Oswald.**

In September, 1964 the Warren Commission issued its report. Among its statements the Warren Commission concluded that neither Oswald nor Ruby had been part of a larger conspiracy – either domestic or international – to assassinate the President.

Despite its seemingly firm conclusions, the Warren report failed to silence conspiracy theories surrounding the event. It certainly did not stop Ruby from maintaining that he was part of a conspiracy. In a post-conviction news conference, Ruby said that unnamed, high-ranking individuals were responsible for his plight and would suppress the truth about Oswald's slaying. According to *The London Sunday Times*, Ruby told a psychiatrist that he had been framed to kill Oswald and that he knew who ordered the killing of Kennedy.

But people who knew Ruby knew better. In an interview Gerald Posner conducted for his book, *Case Closed*, Tony Zoppi, a Dallas reporter, said anyone “would have to be crazy” to make Ruby part of a conspiracy because he “couldn't keep a secret for five minutes. Jack...just plain talked too much.”

After more than two years of maintaining that others were involved in killing Oswald, Ruby reversed his position in December, 1966 – less than a month before his death. In an interview with The Associated Press that he granted as he lay in his hospital bed, Ruby was quoted as saying, “There is nothing to hide. There was no one else.”

In 1978 the House Select Committee on Assassinations concluded in a preliminary report that Kennedy was “probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy” that may have involved multiple shooters and organized crime. The findings of that committee, as well as those of the Warren Commission, continue to be widely disputed.