

# The Fateful Final Hour: How the Drama Built Up

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WASHINGTON — The cast of characters were all in their appointed places by high noon on that never-to-be-forgotten Friday in November.

At almost the precise moment that President John F. Kennedy and his wife were walking along a chain-link fence at Dallas Love Field, accepting the welcoming cheers of a city he had failed to carry in 1960, Lee Harvey Oswald was seen on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository building holding a clipboard for book orders that never got filled.

"Boy, are you going downstairs? It's near lunch time," asked Charles Givens, a fellow employe in the building.

"No, sir," replied Lee Harvey Oswald. "When you get downstairs, close the gate to the elevator."

"OK," agreed Givens.

AND THAT, the report of the Warren Commission revealed Sunday, was the last time anyone saw Oswald until the shooting, when an eyewitness saw a man fitting his description pointing a rifle out of the window.

The 833-page report provides new and fascinating details on the fateful final hour in the life of the President.

Air Force One, the presidential plane, had touched down at Love Field at 11:40 a.m., CST, in bright sunshine after a morning of gloomy overcast.

The motorcade moved out at 11:50 a.m., passing through the

thinly populated outskirts of the city at speeds of 25 to 30 miles an hour. The President sat rigidly upright, because of his back brace, in the right rear seat of his specially designed 1961 Lincoln convertible. Mrs. Kennedy was on his left.

SPECIAL AGENT Roy Kellerman, who sat next to driver William Greer, had ordered the bubbletop removed from the limousine.

"If the weather is clear and it is not raining, have that bubbletop off," White House Aide Kenneth O'Donnell had told him.

The plastic top, the commission noted, "was neither bulletproof nor bullet resistant."

At the President's direction his automobile stopped twice on the way into the city, once to permit him to respond to a sign asking him to shake hands, then to speak to a Catholic nun and a group of small children.

Downtown the crowds were so large and so enthusiastic Special Agent Clinton J. Hill had to hop off the follow-up car four times to ride on the rear of the presidential limousine, and Agent John Ready had to chase a teen-age boy back into the crowd.

AS THE MOTORCADE approached the intersection of Houston and Elm streets, in sight of the book depository, Special Agent Rufus Youngblood looked at the time sign atop the book depository. It was 12:30. David Powers, riding with O'Donnell in the follow-up car, also noted that it was 12:30 and that the motorcade al-

ready was due at the Trade Mart for the luncheon program.

"Seconds later," the report said, "shots resounded in rapid succession. The President's hands moved to his neck. He appeared to stiffen momentarily and lurch slightly forward in his seat."

Turning in the direction of the noise, Agent Kellerman heard what probably were President John F. Kennedy's last words:

"My God, I am hit."

"Let's get out of here, we are hit," Agent Kellerman ordered; Greer jammed down the accelerator. Grabbing the microphone, Kellerman told the lead car in the motorcade, "We are hit. Get us to the hospital immediately."

AT THE SUBURB of Irving, 15 miles away, Marina Oswald was watching television in the home of Mrs. Ruth Paine, where she had a room for herself and the two Oswald children. Mrs. Paine ran in to tell her that someone had shot the President "from the building in which Lee is working."

"My heart dropped," Marina told the commission. "I then went to garage to see whether the rifle was there and I saw that the blanket was still there and I said, 'Thank God.'"

Marina was under the impression that the rifle was still wrapped in the blanket. She was wrong.

In the vicinity of the Texas School Book Depository several people saw a rifle or at least something long and metallic protruding from the sixth-floor window.

ONE OF THEM, a 45-year-old steamfitter named Howard Brennan who had been watching the parade from a retaining wall directly across the street, promptly

furnished police with a description. That night Brennan picked Lee Harvey Oswald out of a police lineup as the man who bore the closest resemblance to the gunman at the window.

While waiting for the motorcade to approach, Brennan had glanced up at the building and seen a man leave the southeast corner on the sixth floor "a couple of times." When the motorcade turned the corner, he heard an explosion.

"Something just right after this explosion made me think that it was a firecracker being thrown from the Texas Book Store," he testified. "And I glanced up. And this man that I saw previous was aiming for his last shot . . ."

"Well, as it appeared to me he was standing up and resting against the left window sill, with gun shouldered to his right shoulder, holding the gun with his left hand and taking positive aim and fired his last shot. As I calculate a couple of seconds. He drew the gun back from the window as though he was drawing it back from his side and maybe paused for another second as though to assure himself that he had hit the mark, and then he disappeared."

AMOS LEE EUINS, a 15-year-old ninth-grade student, also had a good vantage point as the motorcade turned the corner. "I was facing, looking dead ahead at the building," he testified. "And so I seen this pipe thing sticking out of the window. I wasn't paying too much attention to it. Then when the first shots were fired, I started looking around, thinking it was a backfire. Everybody else started looking around. Then I looked up at the window, and he shot again."

Photographer Bob Jackson of the Dallas Times Herald, who would win a Pulitzer prize for his picture of Jack Ruby shooting Oswald two days later, chanced to look at the book depository from his seat in the approaching press car.

"Look up in the window," he cried, "there's the rifle."

Television cameraman Malcolm O. Coach also saw the rifle. Thomas Dillard, chief photographer for The Dallas Morning News, immediately took two pictures of the building. They showed three Negro men in a window on the fifth floor and a partially opened window on the sixth.

The three depository employees at the window in the Dillard pictures were James Jarman, Bonnie Ray Williams and Harold Norman.

WILLIAMS didn't pay any attention to the first shot, "but the second shot, it sounded like it was right in the building, and the third shot . . . cement fell on my head . . . cement, gravel, dirt or something, from the old building, because it shook the windows and everything."

Norman, who also believed the shots were coming from above them, heard something that "sounded like the shells hitting the floor and the ejecting of the rifle."

Jarman "got to thinking about all the debris on Bonnie Ray's head" and told his friends, "that shot probably came from upstairs over us."

All three ran downstairs. Norman and Jarman ran out the front entrance, where they saw Brennan, the steamfitter who had witnessed the shooting, talking to

police. They reported their own experiences.

MEANWHILE, Officer M. L. Baker had arrived at the book depository after almost being blown off his motorcycle by a strong wind. He, too, had heard the shots, had seen people "falling, rolling around . . . grabbing their children and rushing about" in confusion and had figured that the shots had come from the roof of the building.

"I'm the building manager, follow me officer, and I will show you," offered Roy Truly as Baker ran into the building.

Both elevators were in use. Baker and Truly rushed to the second floor where they saw a man on the opposite side of the vestibule door heading toward the lunch room.

"Come here," Baker ordered, with drawn gun.

"So you know this man, does he work here?" the officer asked.

"Yes," said Truly.

Lee Harvey Oswald said nothing. He was permitted to go on his way. Mrs. R. A. Reid, clerical supervisor for the depository, saw him head toward the front stairway.

As he passed, she said, "Oh, the President has been shot. Maybe they didn't hurt him."

Lee Harvey Oswald's reaction to the lady's fervent hope went unrecorded. He mumbled something and kept on going.