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LBJ Had Worried About JFK Visit

Former President Relives

That Grim November

Day Kennedy Came to Dallas

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By LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON

"WE'RE GOING TO CARRY two states next year if we don't carry any others: Massachusetts and Texas."

The speaker was John F. Kennedy. The time was Friday morning, Nov. 22, 1963.

I had gone to the President's eighth-floor suite in the Hotel Texas in Fort Worth to introduce my younger sister, Lucia Alexander, to him.

The President's spirits were high. He had come to Texas for politics, and

PART I: THE BEGINNING

the trip so far was successful — much more successful than I had expected. He had been warmly received everywhere he went.

THAT MORNING in Fort Worth he had already made two speeches, one to a large gathering in a parking lot across the street from the hotel, another to a chamber of commerce breakfast. Money and power were represented at the breakfast, but the parking lot audience — made up of workers, mothers, children — gave me assurance about the mood of Texas. Many of them had waited in a steady drizzle for more than an hour to hear him and to see Mrs. Kennedy.

"Where's Jackie?" someone in the crowd shouted.

"Mrs. Kennedy is organizing herself," the President said. "It takes longer, but of course she looks better than we do when she does it." The crowd loved this, and roared its approval.

NOW IT WAS TIME to leave for Dallas. John Kennedy was thinking about the future, about the approaching Presidential campaign and the necessity for carrying Texas. No one, including the President, considered his re-election to be a cinch. In fact, the President's ratings in the polls were as low as they had ever been.

The polls may have given him cause for gloom, but the people certainly did not.

That was obviously what he was thinking about when he remarked to me, cheerfully, that we would at least carry Massachusetts and Texas. They were the last words John Kennedy spoke to me.

"The Vantage Point," former President Lyndon B. Johnson's own story of his five years in the White House, is one of the key books of our time. In this highly personal record, which he has subtitled, "Perspectives of the Presidency: 1963-1969," the 36th Chief Executive recalls the glories and the agonies of the nation's highest office. Here is what Johnson himself felt about such vital issues as Vietnam, civil rights, the war on poverty, racial violence and other problems he faced during his 1,886 days in office. Here is a record of power, an accounting that is at once revealing and deeply felt, a rare look behind the Washington scene.

In this installment, the first in a 12-part series from "The Vantage Point," President Johnson recalls that grim November day in Dallas when he became the President of the United States.

We were scheduled to fly that afternoon from Dallas to Austin for a fund-raising dinner. That night the Kennedys were going to be our guests at the LBJ Ranch. We were eagerly looking forward to the visit.

MRS. JOHNSON AND I arrived at Dallas' Love Field aboard Air Force Two at 11:35 A.M. We joined the reception line to welcome the First Family when Air Force One touched down five minutes later.

There was a large, joyful crowd behind the fence, and when the Kennedys stepped out of the plane a great roar went up from thousands of throats. I remember thinking how radiant Mrs. Kennedy looked. The skies had cleared, the air was warm and the sun bright. Her pink suit and pink hat added to the beauty of the day. Someone in the reception line added the final touch by presenting her with a bouquet of dark red roses.

We took seats in the automobiles to begin the motorcade through town to the Trade Mart, where the President was scheduled to make a luncheon speech. President and Mrs. Kennedy got into the big presidential Lincoln.

Gov. John Connally of Texas and his wife, Nellie, were in the jump seats directly in front of them. On orders of the President, the famous "bubble top" had been removed from the car. It was a beautiful day and the President wanted no barriers between himself and the people.

In the front seat of our car were the

driver, a Texas highway patrolman named Hurchel Jacks, and the Secret Service agent in charge of my detail, Rufus Youngblood. I was sitting in the right rear seat, Lady Bird was in the center, and Sen. Ralph Yarborough of Texas was in the left rear seat, directly behind the driver. It was approximately 11:55 a.m.

As we drove through the less populated areas, the crowds were thin. But I recall that even then the three of us commented on the visible enthusiasm of the people along the route and their obvious good wishes. Dallas has never been exactly a citadel of Democratic politics.

I HAD BEEN WORRIED about this visit—worried about the political climate; worried about the problems we might encounter.

A great deal has been written about the purpose of that fateful trip to Texas. Much of what has been written is wrong.

President Kennedy came to Texas to raise money for the Democratic campaign coffers and to pave the way for a Democratic victory in Texas in 1964. We were soon to be involved in a presidential election. We would need millions of dollars for the campaign, and the Democratic National Committee was still painfully in debt. The President hoped to raise several hundred thousand dollars in Texas.

Shortly before 12:30 p.m. the motorcade turned right on Houston Street and

then a block later made a sharp left turn on Elm Street, which would take us through the underpass and on to Stemmons Freeway, to the Trade Mart.

We were traveling about ten or fifteen miles per hour. Just after our car made the left turn at the top of Elm, I was startled by an explosion.

IN THE READING I have done since that day of horror, it is apparent that there were many reactions to the first shot. Some people thought it was a firecracker. Some thought it was a bomb. Some thought it was a truck backfiring. Some thought it might be a shot. Some were positive it was a shot.

I did not know what it was.

Agent Youngblood spun around, shoved me on the shoulder to push me down, and shouted to all of us, "Get down!" Almost in the same movement, he vaulted over the seat, pushed me to the floor, and sat on my right shoulder to keep me down and to protect me. Agent Youngblood's quick reaction was as brave an act as I have ever seen anyone perform. When a man, without a moment's thought or hesitation, places himself between you and a possible assassin's bullet, you know you have seen courage. And you never forget it.

I still was not clear about what was happening. I was bent down under the weight of Agent Youngblood's body, toward Lady Bird and Sen. Yarborough, and I remember turning my head to make sure that they were both down. They were. Agent Youngblood had seen to that.

AT SOME TIME in this sequence of events, I heard other explosions.

Then a voice came crackling over the radio system: "Let's get out of here."

Suddenly our car accelerated and we wheeled around the corner, careening over the curb—almost, it seemed to me, on two wheels. I was later told that we were traveling between 70 and 80 miles per hour.

There was some frantic conversation coming over Youngblood's radio and I heard him speaking into it several times. I asked him what had happened. He released his weight from me but still kept me in a crouching position on the floor. He said that he was not sure

but that he had heard that the motorcade was headed for a hospital.

When Lady Bird and I got out, we were immediately surrounded by agents. Youngblood ordered us to follow them into the building, to stay close to them, and not to stop under any circumstances. We followed, almost in a trot.

OUR FIRST specific information came from Emory Roberts, the agent in charge of the White House detail. He said that President Kennedy had been wounded by gunshot and that his condition was quite serious. He added that Gov. Connally had also been injured. I was stunned.

The Secret Service now decided that we should leave the hospital and make plans to return to Washington immediately.

Agent Youngblood concurred. He said that no one knew whether the shooting was the work of one man or several men, or was part of a conspiracy to kill the top leadership of the country.

What does a man think about at such a time? Looking back on it now, it is impossible for me to re-create the thoughts and emotions that surged through me during the 45 terrible, interminable minutes that we spent in Parkland Hospital.

THE REPORTS on the President's condition became more discouraging by the minute. Agent Emory Roberts came in and said the President would not make it. Then Kenneth O'Donnell, the President's appointments secretary, came in and said the President was in a "bad way."

About 1:20 p.m. Central Standard Time O'Donnell informed us of the President's death. "He's gone," was all he said.

I found it hard to believe that this nightmare had actually happened. The violence of the whole episode was unreal, shocking, and incredible.

THE MOST URGENT MATTER, as far as the Secret Service was concerned, was getting me out of that hospital to a place where I could be better protected.

I asked what Mrs. Kennedy wanted to do. O'Donnell replied that Mrs. Ken-

neddy would not leave the hospital without the President's body. He said that they were waiting for a casket. I could not desert Mrs. Kennedy in that situation and emphatically said so. I told O'Donnell that I would not return to Washington until Mrs. Kennedy was ready to go, and that we would carry the President's body back with us if that was what she wanted. I did agree to go immediately to Air Force One and to wait there until Mrs. Kennedy and the President's body were brought aboard the plane.

Our departure from the hospital was similar to our arrival: swift and tense. The journey to Love Field took less than ten minutes; but those few minutes were as crucial as any I have ever spent. I knew from the moment President Kennedy died that I must assume the awesome responsibility of uniting the country and moving toward the goals that he had set for us.

MOST OF ALL I realized that, ready or not, new and immeasurable duties had been thrust upon me. There were tasks to perform that only I had the authority to perform. A nation stunned, shaken to its very heart, had to be reassured that the government was not in a state of paralysis.

I realized that the staff and Secret Service had been right in insisting that I go to Air Force One immediately.

At first, Mrs. Johnson and I were ushered into the private quarters of the plane, which contained a bedroom and bathroom for the use of the President and his family. I told one of the agents that we preferred that these quarters be held for Mrs. Kennedy's use and we went forward to the crowded stateroom, which serves as the presidential office and sitting room aboard the plane. When I walked in, everyone stood up. I still recall the deep emotion I felt. I knew I had to call Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy (in Washington) immediately.

I KNEW HOW grief-stricken the President's brother must have been and I tried to say something that would comfort him. In spite of his shock and sorrow he discussed the practical problems at hand with dispatch. Perhaps the full impact of his brother's death had not yet reached him. He said that the FBI had no indication as to the extent of the plot—if, indeed, there was a plot—but that it was gathering information as quickly as possible. We discussed the matter of my taking the oath of office. I told him that both the Secret Service and the members of the late President's staff felt that I should return to Washington at once.

Atty. Gen. Kennedy said he would look into the matter and report to me on whether the oath should be administered immediately or after we returned to Washington. He also said that he would provide us with the proper wording of the oath. (Later) he said that the oath of office should be administered immediately — before taking off for Washington—and that it could be administered by any judicial officer of the United States. The next call came from Deputy Atty. Gen. Nicholas Katzenbach calling, I presumed, at the Attorney General's direction. He dictated the wording of the oath of office to my personal secretary, Marie Fehmer.

I then called Irving Goldberg, a lawyer friend for many years. We agreed that Judge Sarah Hughes, whom President Kennedy had appointed to the U.S.

District Court in Dallas, should be asked to administer the oath. Goldberg telephoned Judge Hughes at her office.

ABOUT 2:15 the moment arrived against which I had been steeling myself — and dreading to the depths of my being. Mrs. Kennedy was coming aboard with the President's body. Lady Bird and I went to the rear of the plane to meet her. I had not seen Mrs. Kennedy since morning, when we had gotten into our cars at the airport to begin the motorcade. I was shocked by the sight that confronted me. There stood that beautiful lady, with her white gloves, her pink suit, and her stockings caked with her husband's blood. There was a dazed look in her eyes.

I do not remember much of the conversation. It was not really a conversation, just clumsy, aching words of condolence and some half-finished, choked

sentences in reply. Nothing anybody can say under such circumstances is the right thing to say, because no words can ever ease the pain. Men are not very good at such things.

At approximately 2:30 Judge Sarah Hughes was escorted into the plane. I thanked her for coming and told her we would be ready in a minute or two.

THE CROWDED STATEROOM was filling with more people. Members of the Kennedy staff, members of the press, members of Congress, members of my staff, and Secret Service agents squeezed into the small enclosure.

The air conditioning was not on and it was sweltering. Larry O'Brien went to look for a Bible, and he returned with a Catholic missal, unopened in its original box.

I asked Larry O'Brien to find out if Mrs. Kennedy wished to stand with us

during the administration of the oath. A moment later she came out to join us—she standing on one side of me and Lady Bird on the other.

At approximately 2:40 p.m. I repeated the oath of office after Judge Hughes.

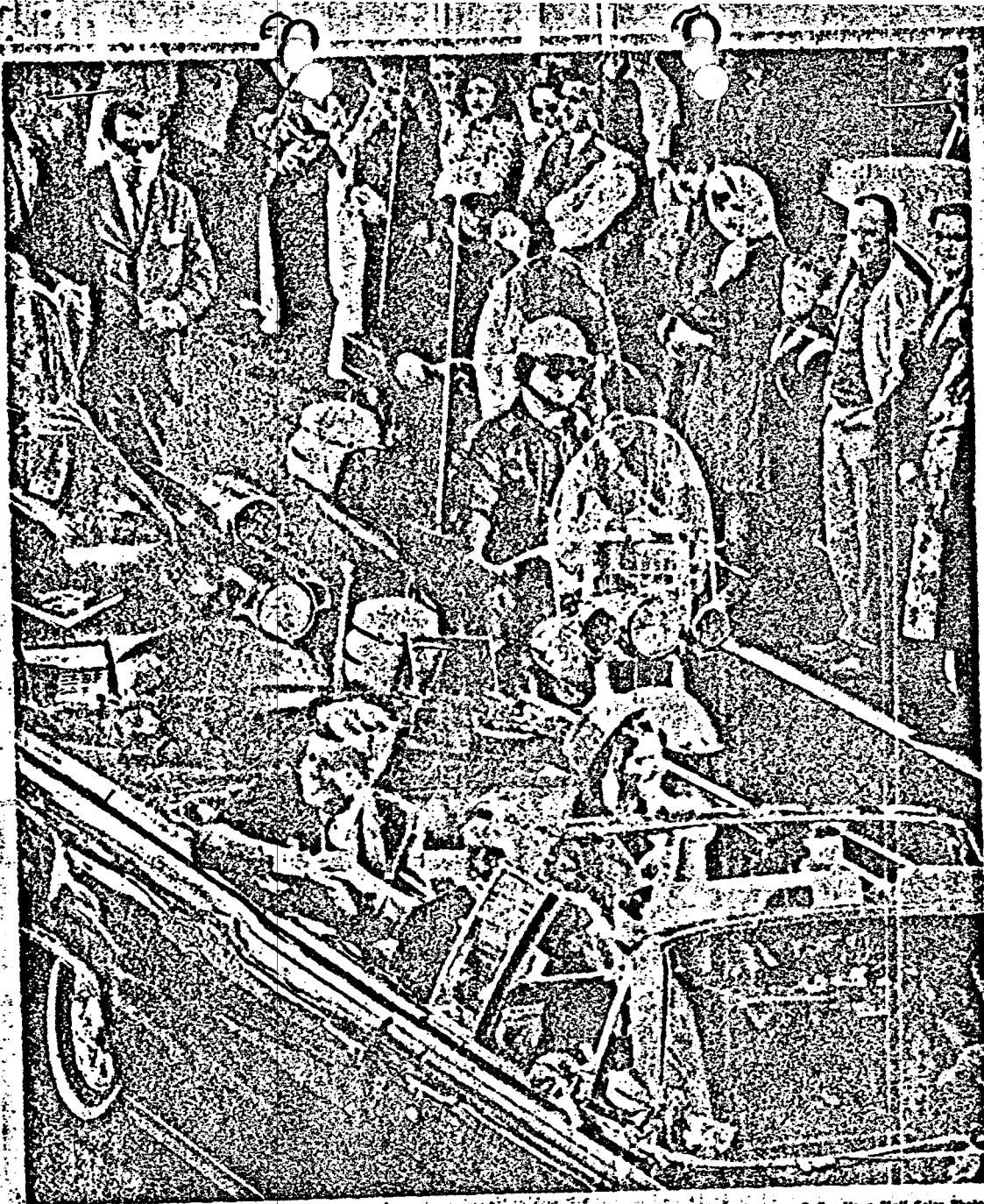
"I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States, so help me God."

Judge Hughes departed the plane and within five minutes we were airborne, headed back to Washington.



—New York Times Social Features.

The stunning events in Dallas of Nov. 22, 1963, showed on the faces of Lyndon Johnson, Lady Bird and, most of all, Jackie Kennedy when they gathered in the cabin of Air Force One to witness Johnson take the oath of office from U.S. Dist. Judge Sarah T. Hughes.



—Dallas News Staff Color Photo.

President Kennedy and Jackie, with Gov. John Connally and Nellie in jump seats directly in front of them, wave to an enthusiastic crowd in Downtown Dallas a few minutes before the

assassination of the President Nov. 22, 1963. This picture was taken by Dallas News photographer Walt Sisco and this is the first time it has been printed in this newspaper.