

# Johnson's

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Field and proceeded through the less-populated areas, the crowds were thin. I recall, however, that Mrs. Johnson and I and Senator Yarborough commented upon the good spirit and obvious good wishes of the crowd. As we drove closer to town, the crowds became quite large.

We made several stops as a result of stops by the automobiles ahead of us. I did not get out of the car, but on occasion a few people broke from the crowd and ran over, and I shook hands with several people on these occasions.

The motorcade proceeded down Main Street and then turned right on Houston. It then turned into Elm, which is a block, I believe, beyond the intersection of Main and Houston. The crowd on Elm Street was smaller.

As the motorcade proceeded down Elm Street to the point where the assassination occurred, it was traveling at a speed which I should estimate at 12 or 15 miles an hour.

After we had proceeded a short way down Elm Street, I heard a sharp report. The crowd at this point had become somewhat spotty.

The Vice-Presidential car was then about three cars' lengths behind President Kennedy's car, with the Presidential follow-up car intervening.

## Agent Pushes Him Down

I was startled by the sharp report or explosion, but I had no time to speculate as to its origin because Agent Youngblood turned in a flash, immediately after the first explosion, hitting me on the shoulder, and shouted to all of us in the back seat to get down. I was pushed down by Agent Youngblood.

Almost in the same moment in which he hit or pushed me, he vaulted over the back seat and sat on me. I was bent over under the weight of Agent Youngblood's body, toward Mrs. Johnson and Senator Yarborough.

I remember attempting to turn my head to make sure that Mrs. Johnson had bent down. Both she and Senator Yarborough had crouched down at Agent Youngblood's command.

At some time in this sequence of events, I heard other explosions. It was impossible for me to tell the direction from which the explosions came.

I felt the automobile sharply accelerate, and in a moment or so Agent Youngblood released me. I ascertained that Mrs. Johnson and Senator Yarborough were all right. I heard Agent Youngblood speaking

over his radio transmitter. I asked him what had happened. He said that he was not sure but that he had learned that the motorcade was going to the hospital.

I did not see anything that was going on in and around

the President's automobile.

## Agents Surround Him

When we arrived at the hospital, Agent Youngblood told me to get out of the car, go into the building, not to stop, and to stay close to him and the other agents. When the car came to a stop, a cordon of agents formed around me. And we walked rapidly into the hospital and then we went into a room there. Because of the method which Agent Youngblood directed for leaving the car and entering the hospital, I did not see the Presidential car or any of the persons in it.

In the hospital room to which Mrs. Johnson and I were taken, the shades were drawn. I think by Agent Youngblood. In addition to him, two or three other agents were there.

As I remember, we got our first specific report from Emory Roberts, one of the agents from the White House detail. He told us that President Kennedy had been very badly injured and that his condition was quite poor. He said that he thought we should make plans to get back to Washington immediately.

I asked about Governor Connally and was told that he, too, had been shot, but that his wound was not serious. I was told that Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Connally were uninjured and that no one else had been hurt.

Mrs. Johnson and I asked if we could see Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Connally. Agent Youngblood told me that I could not leave the room, and I followed his direction.

Mrs. Johnson was allowed to leave for this purpose.

At some time during these events, Kenneth O'Donnell, Congressman Jack Brooks, Congressman Homer Thornberry, and Cliff Carter came into the room.

It was Ken O'Donnell who, at about 1:20 P.M., told us that the President had died. I think his precise words were, "He's gone." O'Donnell said that we should return to Washington and that we should take the President's plane for this purpose.

I found it hard to believe that this had happened. The whole thing seemed unreal—unbelievable. A few hours earlier, I had breakfast with John Kennedy; he was alive, strong, vigorous. I could not believe now that he was dead. I was shocked and sickened.

When Mr. O'Donnell told us to get on the plane and go back to Washington, I asked about Mrs. Kennedy. O'Donnell told

me that Mrs. Kennedy would not leave the hospital without the President's body, and urged me again that we go ahead and take Air Force 1 and return to Washington.

I did not want to go and leave Mrs. Kennedy in this situation. I said so, but I agreed that we would board the airplane and wait until Mrs. Kennedy and the President's body were brought aboard the plane.

It is, of course, difficult to convey an accurate impression

of the period of time that we were in the hospital room. We were all stunned. I suppose we were in a state of shock and there was no time for the shock to wear off sufficiently so that the magnitude of our personal loss of this great man and good friend could express itself in words or in surface feelings.

I suppose, actually, that the only outlet for the grief that shock had submerged was our sharp, painful, and bitter concern and solicitude for Mrs. Kennedy.

Despite my awareness of the reasons for Mr. O'Donnell's insistence in which I think he was joined by one or more of the Secret Service agents that we board the airplane, leave Dallas, and go to Washington without delay, I was determined that we would not return until Mrs. Kennedy was ready, and that we would carry the President's body back with us if she wanted.

## Separate Cars Used

We left the room and were ushered by a cordon of agents to cars which were awaiting us. At Agent Youngblood's insistence, I entered one car and Mrs. Johnson another. Agent Youngblood and I were sitting in the back seat and Congressman Thornberry was in the front seat.

As we started away from the hospital, Congressman Albert Thomas came up to the car. He saw Congressman Thornberry — I don't think he saw me — and he asked the Congressman to wait for him. At my direction, the car stopped and picked him up and he sat in the front seat with Congressman Thornberry. I am sure this didn't take as much as a minute. Congressman Thornberry then climbed over and got into the back seat with us.

When we got to the airport, we proceeded to drive to the ramp leading into the plane and we entered the plane.

We were ushered into the pri-

vate quarters of the President's plane. It didn't seem right for John Kennedy not to be there. I told someone that we preferred for Mrs. Kennedy to use these quarters.

Shortly after we boarded the plane, I called Robert Kennedy, the President's brother and the Attorney General. I knew how grief-stricken he was, and I wanted to say something that would comfort him.

Despite his shock, he discussed the practical problems at hand—problems of special urgency because we did not at that time have any information as to the motivation of the assassination or its possible implications.

The Attorney General said that he would like to look into the matter of whether the oath of office as President should be administered to me immediately or after we returned to Washington, and that he would call back.

#### Aides Suggest Return

I thereafter talked with McGeorge Bundy and Walter Jenkins, both of whom urged that the return to Washington should not be delayed. I told them I was waiting for Mrs. Kennedy and for the President's body to be placed on the plane, and would not return prior to that time.

As I remember, our conversation was interrupted to allow the Attorney General to come back on the line. He said that the oath should be administered immediately, before taking off for Washington, and that it should be administered by a judicial officer of the United States. Shortly thereafter, the Deputy Attorney General, Mr. Katzenbach, dictated the form of oath to one of the secretaries aboard the plane.

I thought of Sarah Hughes, an old friend who is Judge of the U.S. District Court in Dallas. We telephoned Judge Hughes' office. She was not there, but she returned the call in a few minutes and said she would be at the airplane in 10 minutes. I asked that arrangements be made to permit her to have access to the airplane.

A few minutes later Mrs. Kennedy and the President's coffin arrived. Mrs. Johnson and I spoke to her. We tried to comfort her, but our words seemed inadequate. She went into the private quarters of the plane. I estimate that Mrs. Kennedy and the coffin arrived about a half hour after we entered the plane—just after 2 o'clock.

About a half hour later, I asked someone to find out if Mrs. Kennedy would stand with us during the administration of the oath. Mrs. Johnson went back to be with her. Mrs. Kennedy came and stood with us

during the moments that the oath was being administered.

I shall never forget her bravery, nobility, and dignity.

I'm told that the oath was administered at 2:40 P.M. Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Kennedy were at my side as Judge Hughes administered the oath of office.

The plane took off promptly after the swearing-in ceremonies. I then called President Kennedy's mother, Mrs. Rose Kennedy. She had previously been advised of the assassination. I told her of our grief and of our sorrow for her. I gave the telephone to Mrs. Johnson, who also tried to bring a word of comfort to the President's mother. I then called Nellie Connally, the Governor's wife, and told her of our concern for her and John, and tried to give her some comfort.

I then asked General Clifton, the military aide to the President, to call McGeorge Bundy in Washington to instruct him to ask the Cabinet members who were on their way to Japan to return immediately.

When we landed at the Andrews Air Force Base, I made a short statement for the press, radio and television. In my heart, I asked for God's help that I should not prove unworthy of the responsibility which fate had thrust upon me.

LYNDON B. JOHNSON.