

Day Began as Auspiciously As Any in Kennedy's Career

DN-11/23

(Robert E. Baskin, chief of the Washington Bureau of The News, was one of four persons representing the world press in the motorcade which resulted in the President's assassination. This is his account of what happened.)

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It was a day that started as auspiciously as any in the career of John F. Kennedy.

When we boarded the Presidential jetliner, Air Force One, at Fort Worth at midmorning, the White House party was in high spirits. The Fort Worth welcome had been a tremendous one. Shortly before the 15-minute flight to Love Field, ugly gray clouds were swept away by a brisk breeze. The sun was out, and the Texas sky was a vivid blue.

President and Mrs. Kennedy, she strikingly attired in a pink

suit with a pert matching hat, made an instant hit at Love Field as they shook hands with hundreds of persons along the fence line.

Then the last journey began.

The big open Lincoln car moved out smoothly, carrying Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy and Gov. John Connally and his wife, Nellie.

Three cars back was the press pool car, in which three other newspapermen and I rode. Just ahead of us were Dallas Mayor and Mrs. Earle Cabell and Rep. Ray Roberts of McKinney.

Malcolm Kilduff, assistant presidential press secretary, was with us, and as we moved into the heart of the city Kilduff expressed elation over the friendly nature of the welcome and the great outpouring of people.

Everyone in the press car

agreed it was one of the most cordial receptions the President had received in quite a while.

Buoyed by the cheers of the multitudes on Main Street, our motorcade moved on past the courthouse. Then came the approach to the Triple Underpass, with the leading cars picking up speed as the crowd thinned out somewhat. Over to our right loomed the gaunt structure labeled the Texas State School Book Depository.

It was 12:30 p.m.

The sharp crack of a rifle rang out. But at that moment we couldn't believe it was just that. "What the hell was that?" someone in our car asked.

Then there were two more shots—measured carefully.

We saw people along the street diving for the ground.

Several persons shielded children. Then we knew that the presidential party was under fire.

The motorcade ground to a halt. There was a good bit of activity around the President's car, with Secret Service men running about. Before we could get out of our car, however, police sirens began wailing loudly. The President's car started up and quickly was going at breakneck speed.

We did well to keep up with it, skidding around corners.

At that point we did not know what had happened—whether the President was merely being rushed out of the danger zone or if someone had been hit by a shot.

We began to suspect the worst when we roared up to the emergency entrance of Parkland Hospital.

The scene there was one of sheer horror.

The President lay face down on the back seat of the car, with Mrs. Kennedy, her hair disheveled and her hat gone,

slumped over him. The bouquet of roses she had been carrying was on top of the President. There was blood on the floor.

In the seat in front of them, Nellie Connally was holding her husband. The door was opened and Connally, with assistance, stood up momentarily beside the car. A large patch of blood showed on his right shoulder. Connally sighed deeply. He was placed on a mobile stretcher immediately.

Then policemen lifted Kennedy out of the back seat, and he was hurriedly wheeled away on another stretcher.

A little later two priests appeared at the hospital. When they came out of the President's room, they said the last rites of the church had been administered, but they did not indicate that he was dead.

The word came later. President Kennedy died at about 1 p.m. Outside the sun was still shining, but the day seemed to have been transformed completely as the horror of this day—almost unbelievable—began to sink in on us for the first time.