

THE ASSASSINATION:

Mrs. Kennedy and Johnson Stories of Tragic Day Told

New Details Revealed as Main Eyewitnesses Live 'Unbelievable Hour' Again

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BY ROBERT E. THOMPSON
Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—The impact of John F. Kennedy's assassination upon those most intimately associated with the late President was unfolded Monday in poignant testimony released by the Warren Commission.

For Jacqueline Kennedy, there was the haunting belief that she might have saved her husband's life if she had been looking in his direction when Lee Harvey Oswald's first rifle shot struck.

For President Johnson, then the Vice President, there was the remembrance of an unbelievable hour in which he was "shocked and sickened" by the murder of a vigorous young friend.

For Mrs. Johnson, there was the anguished memory of Mrs. Kennedy—"a bundle of pink—just like a drift of blossoms"—huddled over her husband's body in the back seat of the Presidential limousine.

552 Witnesses Heard

These and other reminiscences of the Dallas tragedy just a year ago last Sunday were included in testimony of 552 witnesses queried by the investigative commission under the chairmanship of Chief Justice Earl Warren.

The commission reported in its official findings on Sept. 27 that all evidence indicated that Oswald killed Mr. Kennedy in a solitary act of violence free of any conspiracy.

Although the testimony of witnesses had been planned

for release later this week, it was made public abruptly on White House orders Monday after Associated Press wires moved vast excerpts from the previously secret hearings.

With then-Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy at her side, Mrs. Kennedy was questioned last June 5 by Warren and commission counsel J. Lee Rankin in the seclusion of the home she occupied in Washington after the assassination.

'Terribly Hot'

The former First Lady recalled that as she and the President rode through Dallas, she waved to crowds on the left-hand side of their open limousine, and Mr. Kennedy, sitting on her right, waved to those on the right.

"And it was terribly hot," said Mrs. Kennedy. "Just blinding all of us."

Just before the assassin's bullets hit, Mrs. Kennedy explained, she looked ahead to an underpass and thought to

herself, "It would be cool under that tunnel."

When the first bullet was fired, Mrs. Kennedy said, she thought it was the back fire of a motorcycle in the motorcade. Then, suddenly, Gov. John Connally, of Texas, who was seated on the jump seat in front of Mrs. Kennedy, cried: "Oh, no, no, no."

Mrs. Kennedy said her husband "never made any sound," but she turned to him.

"And all I remember is seeing my husband, he had this sort of quizzical look on his face, and his hand was up, it must have been his left hand," she testified. "And just as I turned and looked at him, I could see a piece of his skull and I remember it was flesh colored. I remember thinking he just looked as if he had a slight headache. And I just remember seeing that. No blood or anything."

Mr. Kennedy then put his hand to his forehead and collapsed in his wife's lap.

In the horror of what she described as "an eternity," the former First Lady said her memory went blank.

She remembered calling out, "Oh, my God, they have shot my husband" and "I love you Jack."

"I remember I was shouting. And just being down in the car with his head in my lap," said Mrs. Kennedy. "And it seemed an eternity."

But much of the ordeal remains foggy in her memory, the young widow said.

Mrs. Connally Testimony
In separate testimony to

the commission, Mrs. Connally recalled more clearly Mrs. Kennedy's reaction in these words:

"Mrs. Kennedy said, the first thing I recall her saying was, after the first shot, I heard her say, 'Jack, they have killed my husband,' and then there was the second shot. She said, 'They have killed my husband, I have his brains in my hand,' and she repeated that several times . . ."

Mrs. Kennedy did not recall that her husband uttered a sound. But Secret Service agent Roy Kellerman, who was in the front seat of the car, recalled that the President cried out: "My God, I am hit."

In talking with Warren and Rankin, Mrs. Kennedy reported that after the assas-

sination she remained confused because "I remembered there were three (shots) and I used to think my husband didn't make any sound when he was shot."

Cleared Up Confusion

Her confusion was somewhat cleared up, she related, when she read that one of the shots which struck the President also hit Connally.

"But I used to think if I only had been looking to the right I would have seen the first shot hit him," Mrs. Kennedy said, "Then I could have pulled him down, and then the second shot would not have hit him."

Now Mrs. Kennedy said, she is convinced that she heard only two shots. She said the President was struck by the second bullet just as she turned toward him.

Neither President nor Mrs. Johnson was interrogated by the Warren Commission.

Mr. Johnson submitted a written statement and Mrs. Johnson sent the commission a recording she made of her recollections two days after the assassination.

Told to Get Down

The Johnsons were riding two cars behind the Presidential limousine at the time of the slaying. Mrs. Johnson said:

"I was startled by the

sharp report or explosion, but I had no time to speculate as to its origin because (Secret Service agent) Rufus 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."

The President said he did not know until he arrived at Parkland Hospital that Mr. Kennedy had been hit and was dead.

He recalled that Kenneth O'Donnell, the President's appointments secretary, walked into a small hospital room, where the Johnsons were under Secret Service protection, and said "He's gone."

"I found it hard to believe that this had happened."

said Mr. Johnson: "The whole thing seemed unreal—unbelievable. A few hours earlier, I had breakfast with John Kennedy; he was alive, strong, vigorous."

The President added:

"I could not believe now that he was dead. I was shocked and sickened."

Although there were many pressures on him to fly back to Washington from Dallas immediately, Mr. Johnson told the commission, he absolutely refused to leave without Mrs. Kennedy and the late President's body.

One of the first things Mr. Johnson did upon boarding the Presidential plane at Love Field was to telephone Atty. Gen. Kennedy to "say

something that would comfort him" and to inquire about taking the oath of office.

The attorney general, now the Democratic senator-elect from New York, asked for a few minutes in which to check on proper procedures.

Telephoned Jenkins

Mr. Johnson said he then telephoned White House Asst. McGeorge Bundy and his long-time aide Walter Jenkins, but added that the conversations were interrupted by a call from the attorney general.

Robert Kennedy advised

Mr. Johnson to take the oath immediately from a federal judicial officer, the President said.

Dep. Atty. Gen. Nicholas Katzenbach, who now is acting attorney general, dictated the form of the oath by telephone to one of Mr. Johnson's secretaries, and U.S. Dist. Judge Sarah Hughes was rushed to the plane.

The President said he sent an emissary to a compartment of the Presidential plane to see if Mrs. Kennedy would stand with him while he took the oath.

He recalled:

"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."

When he was airborne, Mr. Johnson said, he telephoned Mrs. Rose Kennedy, the late President's mother, and Mrs. Connally, whose husband lay seriously wounded.

'Form of Therapy'

Mrs. Johnson told the commission in a brief note that she taped her recollections "as a form of therapy—to help me over the shock and horror of the experience of President Kennedy's assassination."

She recalled that only after arriving at Parkland Hospital did she believe that Mr. Kennedy had been shot.

"As we ground to a halt—we were still the third car—Secret Service men began to pull, lead, guide and hustle us out," Mrs. Johnson said. "I cast one look over my shoulder and saw, in the President's car, a bundle of pink, just like a drift of blossoms, lying on the back seat. I think it was Mrs. Kennedy lying over the President's body."

Inside the hospital, Mr. Johnson said, there was considerable talk about the possibility that a conspiracy might be afoot to kill Mr. Johnson and other officials. Mr. Johnson, therefore, was prohibited by the Secret Service from leaving the small room in which he was guarded.

But, Mr. Johnson suggested that his wife go see Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Connally. Mrs. Johnson said Secret Service agents led her to one corridor, through back stairs and down another cor-

