

Sylvia -

Ever see
this?

-Gray S.

Dallas

I was the advance man for John Kennedy's trip to Dallas.

I don't guess there's a day when I don't think about it, keep seeing the route of the motorcade, the route we planned, the stop at the Trade Mart he never reached, the dinner that night in Austin that was supposed to end the trip. I know that for more than a year I blamed myself for his murder. I don't think that way anymore, or if I do, I don't know it. And I don't blame any politician or pressure group for setting up the chain that ended on Elm Street outside that School Book Depository. I don't have any conspiracy theory to offer. But I somehow think it's important to show how all of the tiny, stupid, petty political fights and feuds can shape a complete change in the world, in history. It doesn't prove anything except how dumb it is to think any of us really can control events, how much it's all up for grabs.

The trip to Texas was political from the word go. There was nobody pretending this was a "non-political" tour of oil wells or cactus or anything else. John Kennedy was going to Texas because he had to have Texas to win reelection in 1964, and because Texas looked like a big trouble spot for his reelection.

"It's a real mess," Kenny O'Donnell said to me at the White House in early October. It was only a few

days after Kennedy had returned from his Western reservation tour, where he'd found the peace theme. He wanted to use in his reelection campaign: talking on Goldwaterism head-on, speaking about stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and radiation. But even before that Western trip was over, the White House was announcing that Kennedy would go to Texas.

Why? First, Kennedy was in danger of losing all of the Southern states in 1964—particularly if Goldwater was the Republican candidate, which everyone took for granted at that time (it was only after Dallas that Goldwater became anything except an odds-on favorite). He'd won Texas in 1960 by less than 25,000 votes, mostly because a bunch of right-wing nuts had spit on Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson in a hotel in Dallas just before Election Day. If there was one Confederate state Kennedy had to have, it was Texas, with its twenty-five electoral votes. And his civil rights stands, with his backing of the law to let Negroes eat anywhere with whites, was making him very unpopular all over the South, including Texas.

Second, the Texas Democrats were completely, hopelessly split. Briefly, Texas liberals and conservatives in the Democratic party were so angry at each other that they were out for each other's blood, first and last. If we couldn't get the whole party working for Kennedy in 1964, the state was as good as lost. And that meant other problems: a lot of the conservatives in Texas hadn't really been for Kennedy. For a lot of them Goldwater would be a really attractive candidate. It was important to do two things: first, to prove Kennedy's popularity so that conservative Democrats would think twice before they went off the reservation; and second, to smooth over the split as much as possible.

Like Kenny said, it was a real mess.

"You'll have to talk to Jenkins," Kenny said. He meant Walter Jenkins, who was Vice-President John-

THE ADVANCE MAN BY JERRY BAUNO
AND LEFT SCREENFIELD, MORROW 1971.

son's administrative assistant. "Walker is a pretty good guy, and he'll brief you on the politics of the trip. After you speak to him, check back here and see what sort of thing we can put together."

Jenkins gave me a straight run-down. It was like listening to somebody talking all about an incurable disease. What we had was a governor, John Connally, who was the leader of the conservative Texas Democrats: oil money, corporate leaders, some rural "red-neck" strength. On the other side was Senator Ralph Yarborough, a Southern liberal, supported by labor (which was liberal in Texas), blacks, Latin Americans, and intellectuals.

They hated each other. Yarborough had helped to lead a primary fight in 1962 which almost beat Connally. (The liberal candidate was Don Yarborough—no relation to Ralph, but it just shows how confused everything was.) In 1964 both Connally and Ralph Yarborough were up for reelection, and each of them was threatening to lead a primary fight against the other guy. (In 1970, Connally helped defeat Yarborough in the Democratic primary. Later that year he was named by Nixon to be Secretary of the Treasury.) In the middle of all this was Johnson, who was with the conservative big-money wing, but who was also going to be on the ticket with Kennedy next time around and had to play it like a man in the middle.

Somehow the trip had to show that President Kennedy could appeal to both sides, that he had the people with him, and that the conservative and liberal wings of the party had to stand together to help reelect him.

I wasn't any happier when I went to see Senator Yarborough toward the end of October. Yarborough, a maverick liberal in Texas politics, was a supporter of Kennedy, and I liked him. But he was angry and bitter. He described how Connally and Johnson were screwing him; worse, he said, they'd be after John Kennedy in a minute if they thought they could get away with it

politically. He was sure that Connally would want to run the whole Texas trip to embarrass him, and as it turned out, he was pretty nearly right.

This was really going to be a wonderful trip; not only would I have all the usual garbage, but every stop, every appearance would be fought over by contacts from the Connally-Johnson wing, versus the Yarborough wing of the party. Right after I spoke with the senator I called O'Donnell at the White House.

"Listen, Kenny," I said, "I know you always give me the best jobs, the easiest trips, and this is really going to top it off."

"Look," he said, "it's not the easiest trip in the world, but it's one thing the President wants to do and we're going to have to make the best of it."

With those cheery words I left for Texas.

Just to show how smooth it all was, I'd arranged to meet with Connally's people that night and with Yarborough's people the next morning. But, somehow, Yarborough's people heard when I was coming down, and when I got to the airport, both factions were there to meet me. Right away I got into a fight over whom I'd meet with first. By the time I got that straightened out, I was ready to go home and forget the whole thing.

Well, the next morning it got worse. First I saw people from the State Democratic Committee—solid Connally people—and the proposed schedule they showed me was as if all of Yarborough's supporters had moved to Alaska.

There were meetings with nobody but the Connally wing. If there was a black spokesman, it was Connally's house black. The same with labor. The same with Latin Americans. And when I said something about that, I got a really heartening answer.

"You're coming into Texas," the spokesman said, "and Connally is the governor."

"Yes," I said, "but there's somebody above even the

governor, and that's the President of the United States."

As soon as I left the Democratic State Committee, I met with some of Yarborough's people. I have to admit that I was mostly on their side. They didn't want control of Kennedy's visit, just a piece of the action. They were supporters of Kennedy all the way; they were for his civil rights and foreign policy stands, while most of the state Democrats were against Kennedy on the big issues. I think it must have been that meeting, and my sense that I didn't like what the Connally people were going to do, that put my back up for the meeting I then had with Governor Connally.

It was a really friendly atmosphere. Connally was at the head of a long conference table. He's a tall, handsome guy, and he was wearing cowboy boots. He really looked the part. All around him on either side of the table were his aides. And I was sitting there, by myself, bootless, about eight feet shorter than he was. At one point they brought in lunch: a juicy steak for Connally, a sandwich for me. And I'll tell you, if you've spent most of your life working with your hands, you know what they're trying to tell you with a move like that.

As we sat there, Connally began outlining the schedule for Kennedy's trip. It was firm, he kept insisting; it was his state, and if the President didn't like it, he could stay home. That really made me feel good.

"I just want to tell you one thing, Governor," I said. "He's the President. I'm here to get everybody's recommendations, and I'll forward them to the White House. But they'll decide."

With that, Connally jumped up from the table, grabbed a phone, and said, "Get me the White House." Then we all waited. "Get me Kenny O'Donnell." Then he started talking about the entire schedule: here's what's going to happen in Houston, here's what we'll do in San Antonio. Then we wait.

"Fine, fine, I'll get back to you," Connally said. And

came back to the table and started in, saying, "This what we want him to do."

I learned only later—a lot later, when it really didn't make any difference—that Kenny had told him the same thing I had, that it was the White House that would make any final decision.

Anyway, we went around one or two more times, and then Connally just got up and left.

"You know," Cliff Carter said to me, "you really handled that all wrong."

Despite all of this fighting, the trip began to click into place. Kennedy would start in San Antonio, then go to Houston, then to Fort Worth, then to Dallas for a luncheon, then to Austin for a big fund-raising dinner, and home to Washington. The one impossible spot on the whole trip was Dallas.

We knew Kennedy would go someplace for a luncheon speech. The question was where. The original plan was to go to the Hilton Hotel, but the group that had booked the hotel ballroom wouldn't give it up. That brought the possible locations down to two: the Trade Mart and the Women's Building auditorium at the state fairgrounds.

The location for a speech shouldn't really stir anyone's emotions, but in fact it was really a matter of deciding what kind of trip Kennedy would make and whom he would be allowed to speak to.

The Women's Building was a sprawling auditorium which could hold four thousand. To fill it, we would probably have opened the place up after lunch was served so the people in Dallas could have come in and heard Kennedy. We would have organized labor committees, chicano committees, women and blacks, to turn people out. It would have been a way for Kennedy to say symbolically, "I want to speak to all the people of Dallas."

The Trade Mart was an enclosed setting. The lunch would be an expensive affair, but more important, it would be closed off. It would have been totally under

the control of the Dallas Citizens' Council--no relation to the White Citizens' Council, but the establishment group that ran that town's politics, social life, and everything else. A Trade Mart luncheon would be a rich people's luncheon: a way of identifying Kennedy with the Dallas establishment.

There was one other key factor in the choice. The Women's Building auditorium was a low-rooted affair. That meant the luncheon dais could only be one level high--so that everybody was sitting on the same basis. At the Trade Mart you could build tiers on the dais. And that's what Connally wanted to do, so that his allies could sit with the President, while Yarborough was put as far away from Kennedy as possible, to prove who had clout and who was out of it--the Russian May Day idea again, that the closer you were to Number One, the more important you were.

There was another point about the Women's Building site that didn't seem important to anyone at the time. If Kennedy had been going there instead of to the Trade Mart, he would have been traveling two blocks farther away from the School Book Depository--and at a much faster rate of speed. At that speed and distance, it would have been almost impossible for a sniper to hit him from the Depository.

With the Dallas site the only unresolved part of the trip, I got back to Washington on November 5 and reported back to O'Donnell. There were still problems--Yarborough said that the Connally-Johnson operation was sitting on its hands, not doing anything to help sell tickets to the Austin fund-raiser on Friday night, November 22. It occurred to me that this could be a funny kind of political move. If Kennedy appeared weak on this trip, it could have bolstered Connally's bargaining position in 1964 by telling Kennedy: "You're in trouble in Texas, and you need us to win. Don't try anything funny, like helping to fight Connally for governor next time around."
But it was the Dallas luncheon problem that was

my mind, and I decided to use the Secret Service. I'd always been a kind of natural opponent of the Service, since their goal was security and mine was pulling out crowds. If thousands of people stopped a motorcade to greet the President, that was a triumph for me. The same occasion meant trouble--big trouble--for the Secret Service. But still, their word on security was final. They could by law order a President not to go some place, on security grounds, and he was bound to obey them.

My idea--and I'd done it before on political advance--was to get the Secret Service to veto the Trade Mart on security grounds. That way there was nothing Connally could do about it, and we would have to go to the Women's Building. I asked Jerry Behn, the head of Secret Service at the White House, to pass the word to the Texas agents to wrap it up. But somehow or other that word never got through. We heard back from Texas that the Secret Service had O.K.'d the Trade Mart as acceptable from a security point of view.

So until less than a week before Kennedy's Texas trip, the Dallas luncheon site was the one part of the trip that hadn't been locked up. It's for this reason that I was never able to believe the conspiracy stories afterward. The motorcade routes for every other city were released weeks in advance. Anybody planning to kill the President could have planned it for any city except Dallas--because the motorcade route wasn't known until a day or two before the President's visit.

On November 18, the advance men for each city were sent to Texas. In planning for this trip, and in testing our ideas for 1964, we decided to try a new approach. I'd stay back in Washington, at the Democratic National Committee where I worked, and local men would go into each stop. That way I could check every detail by phone without having to run around. I'd still go into cities in advance to look them over, but my time and energy could be spent in working

out last-minute problems, from a central desk where an advance man could reach me.

On that same day, Kenny O'Donnell called me from the White House.

"We're going to let Dallas go, Jerry," he said. "We're going to let Connally have the Trade Mart site."

It struck me at the time that this was one of the few fights like this I had lost. I was no inner counselor to John Kennedy or anything like that, but usually, if I fought hard enough, I could generally get my way about what sites he would do best at politically. On things like this my judgment was usually taken. This time it wasn't. I suppose in the end the White House decided that Connally had too much power to screw them in Texas, and that they had to keep Connally happy enough so he wouldn't bolt or sit on his hands for the 1964 election. Because Texas was too vital to lose. Also, it was a case, I think, of the sneaky wheel getting the grease. Yarborough's allies were solidly for Kennedy. There was no chance they'd bolt in 1964, no matter how ticked off they were. With Connally and his friends, you just couldn't be sure.

On the night of November 20, Kennedy flew to Texas. At a time like this an advance man really gets tense. Is the weather going to hold? Will the people bring signs? Will the crowd be friendly? What about hecklers? Will the advance man get the key to open the President's suite, or will he have to stand in the hall for twenty minutes? Will the press get their typewriters and baggage? Will we lose the motorcade route? And suddenly he's on the way, and if it breaks right, it's like the curtain going up on a hit. The bands play, the crowd cheers, the speech gets applauded, and the President is in bed, the day's gone well, and we got through it.

From the time Kennedy landed in San Antonio, it looked like a great trip. The crowds were enormous at the airport, friendly all the way into town. We just had one problem: Senator Yarborough wouldn't ride

the Vice-President Johnson. He was so ticked off at the treatment he'd gotten, he wouldn't do it. The press was noticing it, and I relayed word to Houston to the advance man: "Make damn sure Yarborough rides with Johnson."

In Houston, Kennedy had another great stop. I'd told the advance man to forget the schedule and take Kennedy and Jackie to a Latin-American dinner for a drop-in appearance. It was terrific, with Jackie saying hello to them in Spanish. But in Houston, Yarborough still wouldn't ride with the Vice-President. So I got back on the phone, this time to Fort Worth, where the President would spend Thursday. "Yarborough and Johnson have got to ride in the same car," I said.

Friday morning the party left Fort Worth for Dallas. Since it was only thirty miles away, we'd debated whether to fly there or motorcade the entire distance. In the end, we decided to fly because the motorcade would take Kennedy right by the General Dynamics plant, where the TFX airplane was being built. There was a lot of flak about that plane—its cost and where the contract had gone—and we thought it better if Kennedy had nothing to do with that place. So instead Air Force One flew the short hop to Dallas. And finally, with Kennedy himself making the pitch, Yarborough had agreed to ride with Johnson.

Sometime after 1 P.M. Washington time I checked in with Dallas. I was trying to reach Jack Puterbaugh, our Dallas advance man, to find out how the crowd looked in this city where Adlai Stevenson had been almost physically attacked a few weeks earlier. I raised the Secret Service agent through the White House switchboard and asked for Puterbaugh.

"How's it going?" I asked.

"We got off good at the airport," he said, "and the motorcade looks good."

"Can I get Puterbaugh?" I said.

"I'm not sure where he is right now—let me raise the motorcade and I'll get back—"

All of a sudden he stopped.

"I got to get off, I got to get off," he said, and his voice sounded different. "There's trouble with the motorcade, trouble in the motorcade, I got to get off." And I was cut off.

There were a dozen things I was imagining: a blown tire, a friendly crowd stopping the motorcade, a wrong turn, a right-wing nut that had run out to spit on the President—everything except what happened.

I called back the White House switchboard and asked for Dallas.

"There's been some trouble down there," the operator said. "We can't get through."

Just then a secretary came running up.

"Jerry, Jerry," she was yelling. "The ticker's got a light flashing. They say the President was shot."

I ran over to the Associated Press wire, with a red light flashing, meaning urgent story coming, and there was the flash: PRESIDENT SHOT.

I tried the White House switchboard. The operator was crying.

"We can't get through," she said, sobbing. "The President's been shot."

And it all came back to me. All the police chiefs and Secret Service warnings that always seemed so stupid; all the worry and the jokes about assassinations; all the preparations I'd always laughed at.

Then I was angry, furious, at Connally and his demands to control the trip, where Kennedy should go, and now the President had been shot because we went here instead of there.

And then I thought about me—about how this was the one time I didn't just stick up and fight like a son of a bitch for the place I wanted to go. I never realized how my decisions could be this important. I'm involved with the murder of a President. And then, for the first time in my life, I started to cry.

I left the National Committee and went over to the White House. I guess I stayed there all night, and it was never real, none of it: the floodlights, the announcers, the body being brought back to the White House—it was all like a bad dream. I wandered around, watched Sarge Shriver beginning to plan the funeral, and I did nothing.

I remember only two things about the next few days. The first was the funeral, where I sat with one of the big women newspaper writers. All through the Mass she was crying, and as we left she grabbed me.

"Jerry," she said, "you've all got to stick together. You can't let Lyndon Johnson run the country."

I thought of that a lot in the next few years, because she became one of Johnson's closest buddies and used to rip up Bob Kennedy all the time.

The other thing I remember is that when they were taking the casket down Pennsylvania Avenue on Sunday, I was standing in the crowd. Somebody had a transistor radio and a bulletin came over that Oswald had just been shot. And a woman standing there put her hand over her face and said, "My God, when is this all going to end?"

In some ways, it never did.

Epilogue

I spent a few weeks with the Committee, sending out Mass cards and notes to people who'd worked really hard for John Kennedy, and wondering what I was going to do. I'd just assumed Kennedy would be President for eight years, and then I'd figure out my life.

But there's one memory that tells you something about Washington and the way it is down there. A lot of times I would go to Duke Zeibert's for a beer. And sometimes Kenny O'Donnell would come in. Whenever he'd enter, the place would come alive.

"Kenny O'Donnell's here," you could hear them say,

because he was Kennedy's appointments secretary and a political insider. People would run over, buy him a drink, say hi. It would make their week; they could tell all their friends. "You know who I had a drink with last night? Kenny O'Donnell!"

About three weeks after Dallas, we met at Duke's for a drink. Kenny O'Donnell came in, and nobody moved. Not one guy said hello and offered to buy him a drink. It was all Jack Valenti or Bill Moyers. They had clout now. They were the dear old friends. People Kenny had gotten jobs for would kind of ignore him. And the same people who three years ago said, "Thank God we got new blood, what a fine guy Kennedy is," now were saying out loud, "Johnson really knows Washington. He'll be great." If I called somebody in government, the same people who'd drop everything to take my call wouldn't call back at all. Because I was a Kennedy man, I was out of it.

Washington is so cold and cruel you can't explain it. I'm glad it happened in a way, because it taught me. I wouldn't be fooled that it was my brilliant mind or thoughtful ideas anybody liked. In fact, a few weeks later, Moyers asked me to set up a trip. And within twenty-four hours the word was out. I was in again. I was O.K. My calls were returned, my old friends were old friends again, because I was in with LBJ. Really inspiring.

Lyndon Johnson

I didn't like Lyndon Johnson.

I suppose part of it was unfair. I was in politics mostly because of John Kennedy, and Johnson was the big opposition in 1960, even though he wasn't in any primaries. There was some bad feeling you just can't get rid of in politics. After John Kennedy's death, a lot of us felt Johnson was President because of what had happened to Kennedy in Johnson's home state. Then in 1965 I went to work for Bob Kennedy, and Johnson was the big political opponent there, especially after Vietnam.

But that isn't entirely it. After you take all the personal feelings into account, I think it comes down to the fact that, as somebody once told Johnson when he asked how come people didn't like him, he really wasn't very likable.

He never gave me one of those famous tongue-lashings or threatened my job or anything like that. In my case it comes down to watching politicians with people. I just had this sense that Johnson wanted people to love him, but that he couldn't really relate to people, he couldn't watch people's faces and react in an open situation, and that he'd almost try to push people into caring about him.

There's a story that's told about Hitler (no, I'm not making that comparison) that maybe points this up. Hitler was reviewing the troops one day, and somewhere in the ranks a man sneezed.