

Tragedy Lives On

★ Memory of Nov. 22, 1963,
Always With Gov. Connally

By WILLIAM HAMILTON

AUSTIN (UPI) — Every day there's a reminder of that Friday in Dallas for John Connally.

When he takes a bath or changes clothes, he sees the scarred flesh where the rifle bullet ripped through his torso.

At meals, he reaches for a bowl with his right hand sometimes, but hurriedly changes to his left, flinching from a pain where the shot clipped his wrist.

And when the governor of Texas talks of the events of Nov. 22, 1963, when President Kennedy was murdered and Connally wounded, his normally handsome features cloud and his eyes become glazed and red-dened.

HE REMEMBERS minute details from two years ago.

"The crowd was immense and spontaneous. I thought the President was in high good humor. About the time we arrived in Dallas the sun broke clear and it looked like it would be a perfectly beautiful day."

He rode in the sleek black limousine with his attractive wife, Idanell, and President and Mrs. Kennedy. Connally recalls faces from the cheering thousands lining the motorcade route and remembers, "We were all extremely exuberant about everything that had happened.

"We were looking forward to a great luncheon there in Dallas and to a big dinner in Austin that night. And then we turned to go down the Stemmons Freeway . . ."

Connally reviewed the assassination reluctantly in a special interview at his office in the state Capitol. He posed beside a picture of himself, President and Mrs. Kennedy and then-Vice President and Mrs. Johnson, taken the morning before the assassination at a breakfast in

Fort Worth.

IT WAS A pleasant beginning to a tragic day. "The first inkling I had that anything was amiss was when I heard a sound that I thought was a shot," Connally said. "I tried to turn around to be in front of the President.

"I felt a hard impact, as if somebody had hit me in the back—a very hard blow with a closed fist, it felt like. The first time I knew I had been hit was when I saw blood all over my clothing.

"I said to Nellie, 'My God! They're going to kill us both!' She kept saying, 'Be still, be still. You're going to be all right.'"

"I remember hearing the third shot and knew that someone had been hit a fatal blow. There was blood all over me and the car." Then he lost consciousness.

Connally was hit by a single bullet which wounded his chest, leg and wrist. He was hospitalized for six weeks and wore a sling on the wrist for months.

NOW 48, the governor has recovered. After his much-publicized role in Dallas he won an easy second term last year and is a solid favorite for a third term in 1966.

His hair is much grayer, but otherwise the governor is healthy. He says his wounds provide daily memories of the assassination.

"I think about it almost constantly, almost every day. Every time I sit down to a meal I'm reminded of it. I can't properly use a fork with my right hand," said Connally.

"I try not to consciously think about it, but everytime I take a shower or go swimming, I see the scars . . ."

When Chancellor Ludwig Erhard of West Germany visited Texas in December 1963 he was honored with a 21-gun salute. Both the Governor and Mrs. Connally shivered at the sound of gunfire and Connally says it still shakes him.

BUT HE CONTINUES to hunt occasionally on his ranch near Floresville, in South Texas. "It's the unanticipated noises that unnerve us," he said.

"I don't personally like to relive it all. It should be relegated by now to the pages of history," said the governor. "I granted this interview because I felt I should, not because I wanted to."

The events, of Nov. 22, 1963, taught Connally two lessons, drilling them deeply into his mind. He said he was reassured by the smooth transition from one President to another in a time of crisis, but the steady operation of government machinery even though "we suffered a great shock, a great tragedy." He said it was a tribute to

the American form of government.

"Also, I have had proven to me in a rather forceful manner that time is fleeting," he added. "You never know at what moment you will be called."

HE IS MUCH closer to his wife and their children — John, 19, Sharon, 15, and Mark, 12—because of it all. "I try to spend much more time with them than I have in the past," he said.

Connally has lost touch with Mrs. Kennedy. They corresponded for a time, "but we have not heard from her recently. Our paths do not cross."

Nor has he visited the memorial built to honor the slain president.

"I have been by it, but I've never stopped and visited it. I don't anticipate that I will.

"Maybe I shall. I had great respect and admiration for President Kennedy, but I need nothing to remind me of my relations with him . . . and I don't need another reminder of the tragic occurrence."

THE RESENTMENT against Dallas, branded after the assassination as a "city of hate," is gone also, Connally said. It's a city where he has strong political and personal ties and he was quick to defend it against the charges.

"The anger that welled up inside people, that caused them to strike out in every direction, has almost, if not entirely, diminished," he said. He said he received crank letters blaming him for Kennedy's death, but they too have ceased.

The governor says he believes the Warren Commission properly investigated all details of the shootings. He is confident that Lee Harvey Oswald was the man behind the rifle, as the report by the commission concludes.

As for Jack Ruby, the Dallas night club operator whose life is at stake for the slaying of Oswald, Connally has little to say.

Dallas Dist. Atty. Henry Wade says he will accept commutation of Ruby's death penalty to life imprisonment. Connally would be the man to commute the sentence and he refuses "to prejudge what actions I might take."

Courier Handed LBJ Briefcase That Fateful Day

(Editor's Note—Much has been written about the "little black box" that follows the President around. It contains the coded messages by which he could order an attack on an enemy. Two years ago, on the assassination of a President, the black box changed hands—probably the first act in the transition of power. Here's what happened on that day in Dallas.)

By **BOB HORTON**

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP)—At 1 p.m. on Nov. 22, 1963 a quiet man from Washington named Ira D. Gearheart was in Dallas. His assignment was vital, and it was secret.

So far as the official record goes, there is still nothing to show he was even there.

But while President John F. Kennedy lay dying in Trauma Room One at Parkland Hospital, Gearheart sat outside in the lobby, unobtrusively guarding a brown leather briefcase someone had nicknamed the "football."

Inside the case: Coded messages by which the President could order nuclear missiles and bombs against any enemy.

Gearheart's one assignment that day: Keeping the case within quick reach of the commander-in-chief.

He had flown with Kennedy into Dallas and was riding in the downtown motorcade that suddenly became a race to the hospital.

Moments after 1 p.m., with word that Kennedy was dead of an assassin's bullets, Gearheart picked up the briefcase and strode past the emergency room desk into a surgery suite where, behind drawn shades, sat Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson.

With those few steps came the first real, if not formal, transfer of presidential power.

Gearheart was now following a new leader.

"I can't describe how the vice president looked when I entered the room," Gearheart says, "and I've never been able to decide what my feelings were at that moment. But it was a day I'll never forget."

GEARHEART WAS ONE of the quiet, faceless individuals who have been entrusted to carry the "football," or the "message," or "black box," as the codes have been called, when the President leaves the White House.

All are Army warrant officers, who have been cleared for top security classification. These couriers alternate at carrying the case, although no regulations cover their secret assignment.

Their cargo is a national security portfolio of cryptographic orders the President would send his military chiefs to authorize nuclear retaliation.

The orders can be dispatched by telephone, teletype or microwave radio. All three means are established for the President wherever he goes by the little-known White House com-

munication corps.

Lt. Col. George J. McNally, chief of the White House communications agency from 1946 until he retired a few weeks ago, recalls the system was first instituted late in the Eisenhower administration.

Before then, presidential aides carried the documents. They still do around the White House.

"Communications was our area, though, so logically it seemed we should be responsible for forwarding the 'message,'" McNally says. The Secret Service gave its blessing to an unwritten agreement, and the system was formalized.

The couriers are trained to know what the messages contain and how they are to be used—but they are powerless to use them.

"It would be impossible for anyone other than the President to give the word to use the bomb," the silver-haired, mustachioed McNally said at his Rockville, Md., home. "The Pentagon would merely disregard a message from anyone else."

ONE MONTH AFTER the assassination, Gearheart retired from the military as scheduled, completing 30 years in the Army, including three at the White House. Now 55 years old, he lives in Palm Bay, Fla.

Still the secret man, Gearheart will talk only cautiously about his assignment that Nov. 22, where he was trailing Kennedy through Dallas.

Gearheart said in a telephone interview that he was riding about 10 cars back in the motorcade, and couldn't see the black presidential limousine as it moved past the Texas School Book Depository Building. The radio set was on.

"Suddenly, we heard something like 'he's been shot,'" Gearheart recalls. "We didn't know, but we suspected who it might be."

"Next thing we heard a Secret Service agent or someone in the President's car say 'get to the hospital.' The motorcade took off.

"When we got to the hospital, I helped other communications people open up telephone lines to the airport. Then Secret Service agent Roy Kellerman told me to stick by."

In Trauma Room One, doctors worked over the body of the President. Down the lobby in the surgery suite, Vice President Johnson and his wife were ushered quickly inside under guard.

At Dallas' Love Field, where the presidential jet waited to resume the Texas trip, McNally had been thinking how smoothly the stop was going.

McNally had accompanied presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman and Eisenhower on previous campaign trips. He went to the cafeteria for a bite.

"I had just stepped up to pay the bill when I noticed the cashier, about 55 or 60, sitting there with a glazed look, staring in space. She was talking to herself—'he's in the hospital . . . he's been shot'—then about that time the public address system ordered all personnel to their stations," McNally says.

"I SHOVED HER THE MONEY and we ran to Air Force 1. There was such excitement you'd think the Russians had attacked.

"Within 15 or 20 minutes we got word this wasn't just a shooting—he was dead," McNally says.

A vast communications network was poised for whatever crisis the nation now faced.

As a matter of routine, McNally's communication teams had connected Air Force 1 with two telephone lines: One for presidential use, another for the pilot and crew to keep in touch in case of last-minute schedule changes.

A few minutes after 1 p.m., presidential assistant Malcolm Kilduff officially told newsmen that the President was dead.

With the announcement, Gearheart carried the "football" to the suite where Mr. and Mrs. Johnson sat. He said nothing. The briefcase remained locked.

Quickly, secretly, Secret Service agents escorted Johnson to a waiting police car. Gearheart and agents followed close behind.

At 2:40 p.m., in stifling heat, Air Force 1 rose in a clear sky and headed for Washington. Among its passengers: A newly sworn President, a blood-stained widow and one silent man carrying a brown leather briefcase.

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erge; Result:



Visitors still pass by assassination site.

(12E)
Death