

TV journalists relive coverage of JFK, Oswald assassinations

NEW YORK (AP) — Young CBS correspondent Dan Rather was standing just over a ridge from Dallas' Dealey Plaza, holding a yellow sack, waiting for a film drop from the cameraman in President Kennedy's motorcade.

"I saw what I thought was the president's limousine, and it seemed to make a wrong turn," Rather recalled recently.

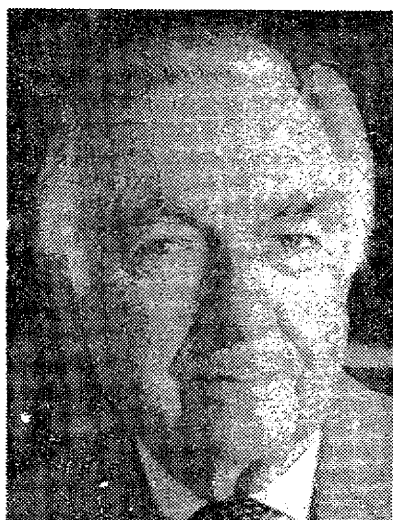
"I knew something was wrong. You know when you know something, but you don't know why you know it? I went back over that ridge and saw an incredible scene. Some people were on the ground, some people were trying to cover children."

CBS anchor Walter Cronkite was in New York, in the newsroom.

"I happened to be standing at the printer when the UP bulletin came across that shots had rung out in Dealey Plaza," he said. "As soon as we got that first report, we ordered up lines and got into the announce booth . . . and started interrupting with voiceover bulletins on the ongoing program. And then we got the camera up there I think in about 10 minutes."

While Cronkite read wire reports on the air, Rather was at CBS affiliate KRLD in Dallas trying to confirm rumors that Kennedy was dead. Rather finally got a surgeon and a priest who were in the emergency room to confirm it. Rather told New York. Cronkite went with it on the air.

"There wasn't any doubt in my mind," said Rather, who had beaten the opposition on the biggest story of their lives. "The official announcement wasn't made for another 17 minutes. It was a very long



WALTER CRONKITE

17 minutes."

After those 17 minutes, Cronkite was handed a piece of wire copy. "From Dallas, Texas, the flash, apparently official," he said solemnly, removing his glasses. "President Kennedy died at 1 p.m. Central Standard Time. Two o'clock Eastern Standard Time. Some 38 minutes ago." Cronkite choked up for a moment, on camera.

On Sunday, the networks were covering the movement of accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald from the Dallas City Jail to the county jail. Only NBC was on live when Jack Ruby stepped out of the crowd and shot Oswald at point-blank range. Tom Pettit was the correspondent on the scene.

"I clearly saw the shooting which was about six feet from where I was," he says. "I had a clear visual field to see somebody fire a revol-



DAN RATHER

er into Oswald's lower abdomen.

"What I was seeing was coming out of my mouth. It was the only time I've really experienced doing eyewitness reporting while you're live on the air."

Pettit said he has never seen his own coverage of the Oswald assassination. "For me it was so horrendous a situation to be in and so emotional and so charged with fear, concern and a sense of pending doom that I would not like to relive it."

"I think these four days were the beginning of the television age, certainly the beginning for television journalism," Rather said. "There was a second-class citizenry to being a television journalist. That day, not only did we take you there, television journalists did some real good reporting. . . . That day, we began to feel, hey, we're as good as anybody."

The proposal was mentioned in a report by the think tank's 937-page "Mandate for Leadership III: Policy Strategies for the 1990s," which is expected to be published next month.

The foundation urged Bush to give new weight to the vice president's constitutional role as presiding officer of the Senate, which traditionally has been a ceremonial post except when the vice president is needed to cast tie-breaking votes in the Senate.

"This will inevitably make him a powerful figure in his own right, but a strong president should welcome the prospect," William J. Gribbin wrote for the foundation.

Quayle, a 41-year-old Republican senator from Indiana, is an ardent conservative whose credentials for the vice presidency were widely questioned during the presidential campaign this fall. Bush has not yet outlined the assignments he will give his vice president.

The volume is the third in a series of policy books by the Heritage Foundation. The first, released shortly after the 1980 election, was considered a blueprint for President Reagan's first term.

The chapter of the latest volume on dealings between the White House and Congress was made available yesterday to The Associated Press.

Gribbin, a staff member of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, recommended that Bush, a former House member:

—Be president of all the people but not try to be a colleague of all of Congress, where he will have real enemies.

—Refrain from appearing on network television joking and backslapping with members of Congress who are hostile to his policies. If a president signals to the public that his adversaries are "regular guys," it won't matter who wins.

—Hire as director of the White House legislative affairs office someone with sufficient personal prestige who cannot be intimidated by other advisers.