

John Connally of Texas, a Power In 2 Political Parties, Dies at 76

By RICHARD SEVERO

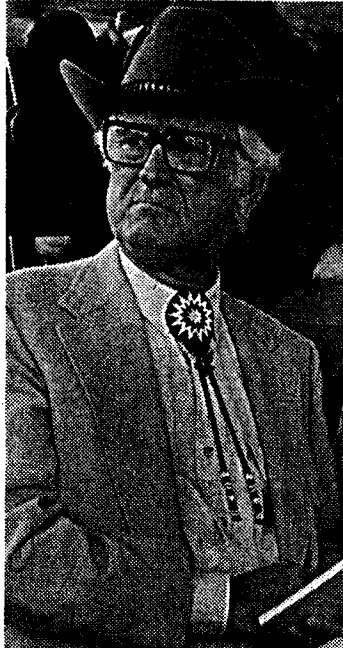
John B. Connally, the former Governor of Texas who served in two Presidential Administrations and who was wounded when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, died yesterday at Methodist Hospital in Houston. He was 76.

The cause was complications of pulmonary fibrosis, said a hospital spokeswoman, Blythe Schaffer. Mr. Connally had been admitted to the hospital May 17 with breathing problems.

Early in his political career, Mr. Connally was a protégé of Lyndon B. Johnson and served as Secretary of the Navy in the Kennedy Administration as well as Secretary of the Treasury under President Richard M. Nixon. After switching from the Democratic to the Republican Party in the 1970's, he was regarded for a time as a serious contender for the Presidency.

Tumultuous Public Life

Mr. Connally's public life was nothing short of tumultuous. On Nov. 22, 1963, while serving his first term as Governor, Mr. Connally was riding in Kennedy's open-topped limousine through the streets of Dallas and was wounded when Kennedy was shot and killed. A bullet passed through his body, leaving Mr. Connally with scars on his back, chest, wrist and thigh. Later, he would recall drifting in and out of consciousness for four days. He said the first sustained consciousness



Craig Stafford, 1985

John B. Connally

he had was of watching television coverage of Kennedy's body being carried to Arlington National Cemetery.

Mr. Connally also said he thought that the shot that killed the President had been meant for him. He said this was because the accused assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, had written a letter asking Mr. Connally, as Navy Secre-

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tary, to upgrade his undesirable discharge from the Marines, and that no action had been taken on the request.

Robert S. Strauss, the former Democratic national chairman, who was one of Mr. Connally's oldest friends, described him last night as "one of the ablest men I ever knew, a man who had an uncanny ability to forget the transitory stuff and retain all the vital information in his head, year after year."

"He was a pioneer," Mr. Strauss said. "He was a different kind of governor than Texas had ever had. He spent a lot of money on mental health and education and other things that were verboten at the time. One time he even put a liberal rabbi on the Board of Regents at the University of Texas, with all those businessmen.

"But after the assassination, he moved right and kind of lost his way."

In his 1989 book "Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician," Stephen E. Ambrose wrote that Mr. Nixon's "admiration for Connally grew to the point of adulation after Mr. Connally advised

A politician who switched parties and Presidents.

him to go ahead with the bombing of Hanoi and the mining of Haiphong." By 1972, Mr. Nixon says in his memoirs, he believed that Mr. Connally "was the only man in either party who clearly had the potential to be a great President."

Mr. Nixon discussed with several of his aides the possibility of putting Mr. Connally on the Republican ticket that year instead of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew. But they demurred, arguing that dumping Mr. Agnew would anger Republican conservatives, and Mr. Nixon gave in.

Part of Mr. Connally's success as a politician derived from his impressive appearance. In 1970, after he was named Treasury Secretary, he was described in an article in The New York Times: "Mr. Connally is tall, gray-haired, handsome, personable and articulate, and his manners and bearing recall those of President Johnson. Yet

he is suave and has a touch of the Eastern establishment."

John Bowden Connally Jr. was born in Floresville, Tex., on Feb. 27, 1917, one of seven children born to John Bowden Connally and the former Lela Wright. His father had been a cowboy, a barber and a grocer before turning to dairy farming and finally tenant farming. The family's circumstances were always quite modest; there often were debts and struggles to pay them.

The younger John Connally attended public schools in Harlandale, where his family lived, and in nearby San Antonio. He then went to the University of Texas, where he received a bachelor's degree and then a law degree.

In college he was interested in campus politics, oratory and acting, and was elected president of the Students Association. He also developed a desire to amass land and money, and never return to the poverty he knew as a boy.

Mr. Connally met Lyndon Johnson when he was a young Congressman from Texas in the late 1930's, and was a campaign worker for him.

An Aide to Eisenhower

In World War II Mr. Connally served as a Navy officer, first as a legal assistant to James V. Forrestal, who was then Secretary of the Navy, and later in North Africa on the staff of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower when he was planning the Allied invasion of Italy. Still later, reassigned to the Pacific, Mr. Connally won the Bronze Star for valor.

After the war he worked again in Johnson's Congressional campaigns, and managed his successful campaign for the United States Senate in 1948. During this period Mr. Connally also practiced law, first in Austin, Tex., and later in Fort Worth.

In 1952 he bolted the Democratic Party to help Eisenhower win the Presidency at the behest of Mr. Connally's client, Sid W. Richardson, a wealthy oil executive.

His defection did not bother Johnson, who valued Mr. Connally's aggressiveness and skills and continued to rely on them as he steadily gained power in the Senate.

They were effectively used again in 1956, when Mr. Connally helped his mentor wrest control of the Democratic Party in Texas from Gov. Allen Shivers. Johnson was grateful, but later reportedly told his Under Secretary of State, George W. Ball, that Mr. Connally could "leave more dead bodies in the field with less remorse than any politician I ever knew."

A Lucrative Association

In the early 1950's Mr. Connally had become a lawyer for Mr. Richardson, who ultimately put him in charge of running his business ventures in Texas and Jamaica. The association proved most lucrative to Mr. Connally, who eventually became one of the executors of Mr. Richardson's estate.

In 1960 Mr. Connally managed John-

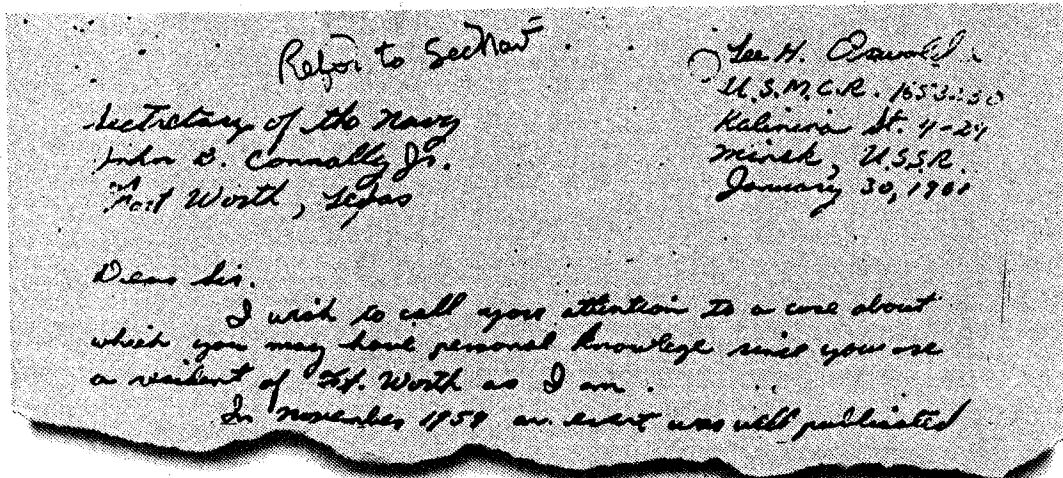


John B. Connally, right, who was then Governor of Texas, sitting with President and Mrs. Kennedy in the limousine in which Kennedy was assassinated on Nov. 22, 1963. Mr. Connally, who later in the motorcade moved to the front seat of the car, was also shot in the attack.

Associated Press

son's unsuccessful campaign to wrest the Democratic Presidential nomination from Kennedy and worked for the Democratic ticket after Kennedy chose Johnson as his running mate.

Mr. Connally was instrumental in the ticket's carrying Texas, the key to the Democratic victory, and Johnson gave him much of the credit for the narrow defeat of Mr. Nixon and his running mate, Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts. In a letter to Mr. Connally, the Vice President-elect said, "Except for



Mr. Connally said he thought the attack on the President was meant for him. His belief was based on a letter written to him when he was Secretary of

the Navy by Lee Harvey Oswald, who requested that his undesirable discharge from the Marines be upgraded. The request was not acted upon.

you, I know the outcome would have been different."

As a condition of accepting the Vice-Presidential nomination, Johnson was given control of appointments to the Kennedy Administration from Texas, and Mr. Connally was thus assured of an important post.

He became Kennedy's Secretary of the Navy in January 1961, but resigned the post in less than a year to make a successful run for governor of Texas, a job he held from 1963 to 1969. At the time of the assassination, Kennedy was visiting Texas in the hopes of mending some political fences, and Mr. Connally, as Governor, was accompanying him. Governor Connally had a reputation as a big spender, focusing on the improvement of higher education and establishing the state as a magnet for development during his three two-year terms.

Conservative Connections

Mr. Connally was in the conservative wing of the Democratic Party, and in 1969 Mr. Nixon, who liked Mr. Connally's politics, asked him to serve on an advisory commission to reorganize the

executive branch.

Mr. Nixon was so impressed with Mr. Connally that he named him Secretary of the Treasury in 1971. As Secretary until 1972, Mr. Connally was largely responsible for the Federal guarantee of some \$250 million in loans to the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, then the nation's largest major military contractor but near collapse because of major cutbacks in military spending and other setbacks in its civilian projects.

It was during his tenure, in August 1971, that the United States went off the gold standard, which had the effect of inaugurating the era of floating currencies and devaluing the dollar. The Administration also imposed wage and price controls in an effort to control inflation.

"We are at the end of an era in our economic policy," Mr. Connally declared in an interview that month, defending the moves. "American business and labor may have to get used to the idea of living within certain parameters."

Mr. Connally gave the President some advice on matters not related to

money. According to "The Lone Star," a biography of Mr. Connally written by James Reston Jr. and published by Edward Burlingame Book/Harper & Row in 1990, Mr. Connally urged Mr. Nixon to consider the use of nuclear weapons to win the Vietnam War.

In May 1973, three months after Johnson's death, Mr. Connally officially became a Republican. He said that party was his "true philosophical home" because it "it best expressed the broad view of most Americans, whatever their party affiliation."

Special Adviser to Nixon

In 1973, as Mr. Nixon became more deeply embroiled in the Watergate scandal, he turned to Mr. Connally for help and named him a special adviser, a job that he held for 69 days before quitting. Mr. Reston says in "The Lone Star" that Mr. Connally resigned because Mr. Nixon picked the House minority leader, Representative Gerald R. Ford of Michigan, as Vice President to replace Mr. Agnew, who resigned on Oct. 10, 1973, after pleading no contest to a charge of tax evasion stemming from kickback payments he had re-

ceived as Governor of Maryland.

Months later, with Mr. Connally out of public office, Mr. Ford was sworn in as President after Mr. Nixon resigned rather than face impeachment over the Watergate scandal.

In 1974 Mr. Connally was indicted by a Federal grand jury on charges of perjury and conspiracy to obstruct justice. Prosecutors said he had taken \$10,000 from the American Milk Producers Inc. after persuading Mr. Nixon to back a controversial increase in price supports for milk in 1971. Mr. Connally was exonerated by a Federal jury in Washington in 1975.

But Mr. Connally continued to be active in politics even after this incident. In the late 1970's he unsuccessfully opposed Ronald Reagan's drive to control the Republican Party, and in 1980 he made a costly but losing campaign for the Republican Presidential nomination.

After that, he abandoned whatever aspirations he had for public office and concentrated on making money, which led to a partnership with former Lieut. Gov. Ben Barnes of Texas.

But in 1988 Mr. Connally declared bankruptcy, placing the blame for his \$93 million personal debt mostly on bad real estate, oil and gas investments he made in Texas as the state's economy began to worsen. He was forced to sell most of his 2,674-acre ranch near Floresville, along with his horses, Chippendale and Louis XIV furniture, fine china, rifle collection and ceremonial saddles inlaid with his initials in gold.

Left with his ranch house and a mere 200 acres, Mr. Connally said, "I know what it is to be poor." To the surprise of nobody who knew him, he emerged from bankruptcy within a year.

His survivors include his wife of 52 years, the former Idanell Brill; two sons, John 3d of Houston and Mark M. of Austin; a daughter, Sharon C. Ammann of Austin; four brothers, two sisters, eight grandchildren and one great-grandchild.