

John Connally, 76, Of Texas, Is Dead

Ex-gov. was with JFK in Dallas

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Houston — John B. Connally, the embodiment of the larger-than-life Texas politician who came to national prominence 30 years ago when he was wounded during the assassination of President John Kennedy, died yesterday. He was 76.

He was admitted to Houston's Methodist Hospital May 17, complaining of a breathing obstruction. His condition was complicated by infection and pneumonia and he had been in critical condition for most of his hospital stay.

Connally, whose wavy white hair and imposing presence were a fixture on the Texas and national political scenes, served three terms as governor. Over the course of a public career that spanned four decades, he also was secretary of the Navy, secretary of the Treasury and a failed candidate for the Republican presidential nomination.

In the twilight of his career, Connally was staggered by personal financial problems that led to bankruptcy and the humiliation of auctioning off most of the belongings that he and his wife, Nellie, had accumulated over a lifetime. But he did so with a dignity that brought plaudits even from former political adversaries.

When he filed for bankruptcy, noted Texas histori-

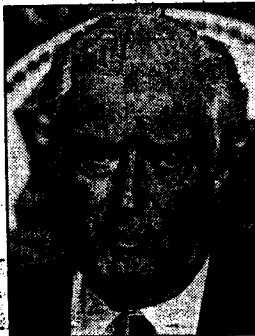
an T. R. Fehrenbach likened it to "a lion being brought down."

President Bill Clinton said yesterday that Connally's life "was one of service to his country and of dedication to the principles in which he so passionately believed."

"He will be remembered fondly by his state and his country for the work that he did and the person that he was," Clinton said.

In Austin, Gov. Ann Richards said, "I lost a real good friend . . . I'll miss his extraordinary good humor. I'll miss his optimism and his encouragement."

Along with his successes, there also were some low points, errors in timing and at least the scent of malfeasance during Connally's long public career. They included his financial losses; his switch to the Republican Party just as the Watergate investigation was beginning; his indictment, and acquittal, on charges that he took a \$10,000 bribe from milk producers; and his expenditure of \$12 million in a futile run for the presidency in 1980 that garnered him only one convention delegate. Despite that, and in part because he was shot while



Connally AP Photo

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riding next to Kennedy in 1963, Connally retained his almost mythic stature in Texas long after he had bowed out of the public arena. The nickname of "Big John" stayed with him through a lifetime.

Connally was born in Floresville, a tiny south Texas town in the peanut-growing region of the state. The third of seven children, he was named after his father, John Sr. At the University of Texas, Connally distinguished himself as a thespian and orator and was elected president of the student assembly. In 1937 he worked as a volunteer for a young man making his first bid for the House of Representatives—Lyndon B. Johnson. In 1939, a 22-year-old Connally went to Washington as Johnson's secretary.

Connally enlisted in the Navy in World War II and rose to the rank of lieutenant commander. Back in Texas, he managed Johnson's 87-vote victory over Gov. Coke Stevenson for a U.S. Senate seat in 1948, and for years afterward stories lingered on about ballot box stuffing in south Texas and Connally's possible involvement. Connally denied any wrongdoing. He practiced law in Texas, and in 1960 helped in Johnson's losing effort for the Democratic presidential nomination.

When Kennedy was elected president in 1960, he appointed Connally secretary of the Navy. After a year, he resigned to return to Texas to run for governor.

Appearing with Kennedy in a parade in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, he was struck by a bullet that left scars on his back, chest, wrist and thigh.

Connally became something of a national celebrity in the aftermath of the assassination. He was overwhelmingly re-elected governor in 1964.



Connally, in right foreground, about to ride into Dallas with President John Kennedy and his wife, Jacqueline Kennedy, on Nov. 22, 1963. Bettmann-UPI Photo

In 1971, Connally—still a Democrat—was appointed by President Richard Nixon to be secretary of the Treasury. In 1973 he shocked the Democratic community by switching to the Republican Party.

After his embarrassing showing in the 1980 presidential primary, Connally settled into private life.

At one point, Connally had dozens of projects going at once, most of them in real estate and energy. When the oil market collapsed, Connally was ruined. He told the bankruptcy court that he had debts of \$93 million against assets of only \$13 million.

In 1990, on the eve of the Persian Gulf war, Connally and Texas millionaire Oscar Wyatt traveled to Iraq and negotiated the release of 21 hostages held by Saddam Hussein.

Survivors include his wife, two sons and a daughter.