

EDITORS NOTE

Of John F. Kennedy, Abraham Zapruder and T. S. Eliot: A Memoir of Grief Delayed

**W**here were you and what were you doing when President Kennedy was shot? If you're over 30, maybe even 25, you remember. When we began planning the 32 pages in this issue on the President and his assassination, we asked our staff for their memories of November 1963.

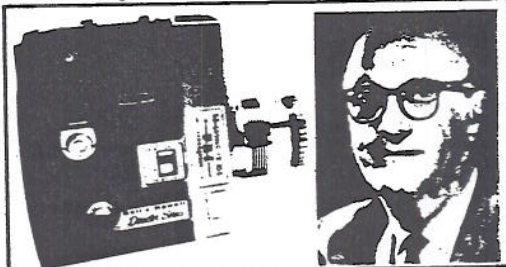
One reporter got into a fistfight at soccer practice with the son of a Republican diehard and Kennedy-hater. "We were both kicked off the team for a week." A writer was on a crosstown bus that night when it passed a Kennedy memorial display at Saks Fifth Avenue. "I remember realizing how extraordinary it was to be riding on a bus on which everyone was thinking the same thoughts." And an editor who went to church Sunday morning came out to hear that Ruby had shot Oswald. "We thought the world had gone completely nuts."

Shock, disbelief, anger and tears—so many tears—for a slain young President, for our country, for ourselves. From the perspective of two decades we set out to tell the story again. Senior editor Mary Steinbauer was in charge, assisted by reporters Doris Kinney, Marcia Smith (Dallas) and Penny Moser (Washington). From their five months of work has come a story combining heartbreakingly familiar pictures with others never before published and new reporting on some of the men and women caught up in history 20 years ago.

In a minor way, I was among them. I arrived in Dallas four hours after the assassination from Los Angeles, where I was stationed as LIFE Bureau Chief. With me was LIFE correspondent (and later famed author) Tommy Thompson. We went to work immediately. Tommy found Oswald's wife, Marina, and mother, Marguerite, and then to protect his exclusive interviews, hid them Saturday night in a suite in our hotel. (We did tell the Secret Service.) The next day, when Oswald himself was killed, we raced back to the hotel. Their door was open, the suite empty. Fearing a conspiracy to murder the entire family, agents had rushed them out of town. (Tommy described this episode in his best-selling novel *Celebrity*.)

Meanwhile, late Friday I learned that a Dallas garment manufacturer named Abraham

Zapruder had photographed the assassination on his 8mm movie camera. I called his home, discovered to my surprise that no other reporter had contacted him and pleaded to see his film that night. He was tired and distraught and told me to come to his office the next morning at nine. I showed up at eight, and Zapruder allowed me to watch as the film was shown for the first time to the Secret Service. It was a grim experience.



Minutes later, I was negotiating Zapruder and his famous movie camera rights to the most famous home

movie in history. I typed out a simple agreement. We signed it, shook hands and I slipped out a back door with the film, leaving poor Abe, a gentle man, to face a room full of irate editors all anxious to buy it themselves.

Zapruder wanted LIFE to have it, he told me, because he trusted us never to exploit his chance filming of the death of a man he deeply admired. LIFE made copies of the film available to government agencies, and it became one of the crucial pieces of evidence at the Warren Commission hearings. Eight years ago LIFE returned the original film and all rights—for which we had paid \$150,000—to the Zapruder family for one dollar.

Covering Dallas left us almost no time to watch the events in Washington on television. As a result, I felt curiously isolated from the national mourning. I remember glancing at the screen and hearing the Navy hymn, an old favorite of mine, played over and over. But just as my throat tightened, off I'd go on another part of the story. By the time I got back to Los Angeles, people were exhausted; nobody wanted to talk about it any more.

It is not a story I would have wanted to miss, but over the years I have had a strange sense of deprivation that I was not allowed to watch and grieve. I don't feel that way now. Putting this issue together took me back through those four days as if they had just happened. I felt the pain so many of you had felt 20 years ago, and I managed, as T. S. Eliot once wrote, to "know the place for the first time."

*Richard B. Stolley*  
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## 1:38 P.M. A Hospital in Turmoil

At 1:15 Doris Nelson was eating lunch with other nurses in the Parkland Hospital cafeteria. "We were talking about what would happen if the President was in a car wreck or something," she remembers. "I said they'd never bring him here, they'd take him to a hospital in town." When Nelson returned to the emergency room, the phone was ringing. "It was the switchboard operator. She said, 'Doris, the President's been shot, and he'll be here in five minutes.' I said, 'Yes, Phyllis, so what else is new?'" At first, nobody believed Nelson either. "By the time I got two doctors and the head nurse convinced, they were rolling him down the hall." Nelson was emergency room supervisor. "As I looked around, I didn't see anyone from the higher echelon in the hospital, so I thought, 'Doris, you've got it.'" Connally came first. "He had been pretty badly wounded, and his skin was real pale. So I just ripped off his shirt to see where the injuries were. I put him in Trauma Two. Right behind him came the President. Jackie was walking beside him. A rose was lying across the stretcher. I put him in Trauma One." While physicians hovered over the President, Nelson stood at the door, screening the flow of nurses, doctors and Secret Service agents. "At one point, Jackie decided to go into the room when they were doing a tracheotomy on him. I thought it was not in her best interest or in the best interest of the patient or the physicians. I suggested she wait outside. But the agent in charge said that if she wished to go in, that was her prerogative." Nelson was impressed by the First Lady. "I was amazed at how poised she was. I asked her if she would like to remove her gloves and wash her hands, and she said, 'No, thank you, I'm fine.' She seemed almost in a trance." Nelson herself was on automatic pilot. "About an hour after it was over, someone brought me a cup of coffee. My hands started shaking so, I couldn't hold it. That's when it hit me." (Doris Nelson died last month of liver cancer at 52, shortly after she gave this interview.)

**Nurse Doris Nelson shows the location of the President's fatal head wound.**



BOB ABERNETHY

FRIDAY

## Artifacts of Infamy

Deep in the labyrinthine stacks of the National Archives, not far from the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, archivist Marion Johnson broods over 630 file boxes and nine crates. They contain most of what is known about one of America's darkest days: the 3,154 documents, photographs and objects of the Warren Commission's 10-month investigation into the assassination of John F. Kennedy. (Some of the evidence, arranged for the photographer, is at left.) Ever since the commission published its 888-page report 19 years ago, based on 26 volumes of interviews, testimony and documents, Johnson has said yes or no to requests to see the evidence—many of them from researchers who cannot accept the verdict that one man, acting alone, killed the President. Conspiracy theories (agents of China, Russia or Cuba) waned in the late '60s and then drew fresh life from 1973 Watergate revelations of CIA and FBI misconduct. When Congress reopened the case in 1976 (a Justice Department report is expected at year's end), its committee members relied on evidence from Marion Johnson's windowless and ultrasecure stack room. While the 67-year-old archivist has no retirement plans, he has been helping young staffers learn the assassination section. "It wouldn't really be any trouble for someone else to continue it," says Johnson. "Yes," responds a co-worker. "In twenty-five or thirty years they'd catch up."

MICHAEL O'NEILL (2)



**Johnson with lime windshield**

POSTSCRIPT



## 2:50 P.M. Capturing the Killer

As the drama of death played out at Parkland Hospital, police officer J. D. Tippit challenged a man on a Dallas street six miles away. The man, Lee Harvey Oswald, fit a description of the gunman in the Book Depository window. Oswald shot and killed Tippit, and then ran into the Texas Theatre, which was showing a double bill, *War Is Hell* and *Cry of Battle*. Within 10 minutes some 15 Dallas policemen converged on the theater. The movie projector stopped; the house lights were turned up. Patrolman Nick McDonald (right) was about to experience the most important moments of his life. The man who now signs his name "Officer Maurice N. McDonald, Captor of Oswald" remembers: "We were inches apart. I said, 'Get on your feet.' He stood up immediately, saying, 'Well, it's all over now,' and raised his hands. Suddenly, he made a fist with his left hand and hit me between the eyes, knocking my cap off. At the same time, he pulled a pistol from his waist with his right hand." McDonald lunged for the pistol and threw a right cross to Oswald's head. "As he was falling back into the seat, he pulled the trigger," says McDonald, 55, now retired from the police force. "The hammer made an audible snap as it hit the webbing between my thumb and forefinger." McDonald yanked the gun away, stuck it into Oswald's stomach and almost pulled the trigger himself, but feared the bullet would pass through Oswald and wound an officer directly behind him. Oswald, yelling about "police brutality," was rushed to headquarters while McDonald went back to the theater to retrieve his hat. At headquarters, Capt. J. Will Fritz told a policeman to go to suburban Irving to pick up a suspect in the Kennedy assassination named Lee Harvey Oswald. "Captain," said an officer, "we will save you a trip. There he sits." About an hour after the arrest, Kennedy's widow and White House aides huddled in the office of *Air Force One* to witness the swearing-in of the nation's 36th President.

## 1:50 P.M. Waiting with the First Lady

Outside the trauma room the First Lady sat on a wooden chair. "She was very, very calm," recalls retired Dallas Police Sgt. Robert Dugger, 62, who stood near her in the corridor. "She asked me if I had a cigarette and I said, 'I'm sorry, but I don't smoke.' She said, 'I have some cigarettes in my purse, will you get them for me?' One of the Secret Service guys came over and said, 'Get your hand out of Mrs. Kennedy's bag,' and she put him down pretty quick." Meanwhile, curious hospital personnel gathered at the corridor door for a peek at the First Lady. "The whole staff was coming to stare at her," says Dugger, "so I asked the nurse to put paper over the window." Dugger himself glanced into the trauma room. "The wound was real bad. They had some type of lifesaving equipment hooked up to him. It was very quiet." At two p.m. the President was pronounced dead, and his body placed in a casket. Wanting to leave something with her husband, Mrs. Kennedy slipped off her wedding band. "She tried to put it on his ring finger, but it couldn't go past the knuckle," remembers Dugger. "She asked me to try, but I couldn't get the ring on either. We left it there, on the first knuckle." Dugger began to break. "I was having trouble with my vision," he says, "tears coming down. She cried just a little. Then she regained her composure."

Outside Parkland, agents clean the bloody limousine.



Dugger stood vigil.