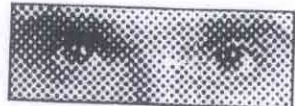


30th anniversary.

Meanings and memories of JFK



EYEWITNESS

Simon Tisdall in Dallas

LIKE children looking for something that they lost and cannot find, Americans gathered here in their thousands on Monday to honour the memory of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. As on November 22, 1963, the best vantage point was the sixth floor corner window of the Texas School Book Depository.

The wood-frame window, known as the Sniper's Perch, is kept permanently half open. The cardboard boxes which the gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, hid behind are still in place. The depository is not a tall building. Elm Street, down which Kennedy's motorcade passed, is just below, far closer than a man bent on murder should ever get to a president.

"You realise how incredibly near to him Oswald was, what an

easy shot he had," said Joan Mallacci of Houston, as she gazed on the road, trees, and grassy knoll of Dealey Plaza.

At a plaza ceremony attended by ageing eyewitnesses, people from all over the country and abroad, and by still guilt-ridden Dallas city officials, a JFK memorial plaque was solemnly dedicated, 30 years to the hour of his dreadful passing.

Nellie Connally, who with her late husband, former Texas governor John Connally, was in the Kennedy car, unveiled it. "We are gathered not to look back with grief but to look forward with hope," she said.

The marble plaque resembles a tombstone, flat in the grass verge, adjacent to the spot in the road where Kennedy took a second, fatal bullet. The entire plaza has been designated a National Historic Landmark.

In truth, the ceremony was simply America's latest, vain attempt to lay JFK to rest. And here amid the sorrow and shame of Dallas, the search for an explanation, for meaning, and for mislaid hopes went painfully on.

"I cannot think what might

have been had he lived," wrote J. Pelciano in the Memory Book, kept in the depository museum.

"The American people have the right to know the truth," said Michelle Autry. "The government doesn't have the right to hide it."

With the eyes of the nation once again on Dallas, nothing was allowed to go wrong. The police department was out in force in the plaza. Overhead, against a cold blue sky, flew the flag of the Lone Star State. The national anthem was sung, schoolchildren recited passages from JFK's speeches.

But for many present, these were temporary distractions at a place of pilgrimage, at a shrine of self-discovery.

"I just had to come here to get it out of me," said Roger Smith from Milwaukee as he walked the plaza. "It isn't what he did, it's what he was going to do."

"I remember the shock, the terrible sadness of that day," said Tory Bezazian from Burbank, California. "Now I've brought my son to see for himself. It's an incredible emotional experience."