

By Lyndon B. Johnson: 'The Vantage Point'

The New York Times begins publication of excerpts from Lyndon Baines Johnson's memoirs of his Presidency, to be published in book form by Holt, Rinehart & Winston on Nov. 7 under the title "The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969."

PREFACE

It has been said that the Presidency is the loneliest office in the world. I did not find it so. Even during the darkest hours of my Administration, I always knew that I could draw on the strength, support and love of my family and my friends.

But if I was seldom lonely, I was often alone. No one can experience with the President of the United States the

glory and agony of his office. No one can share the majestic view from his pinnacle of power. No one can share the burden of his decisions or the scope of his duties. A Cabinet officer, no matter how broad his mandate, has a limited responsibility. A Senator, no matter how varied his interests, has a limited constituency. But the President represents all the people and must face up to all the problems. He must be responsible, as he sees it, for the welfare of every citizen and must be sensitive to the will of every group. He cannot pick and choose his issues. They all come with the job. So his experience is unique among his fellow Americans.

For better or worse, then, this is a book that only a President could have written. That is the sole excuse for its

existence. I make no pretense of having written a complete and definitive history of my Presidency. I have tried, rather, to review that period from a President's point of view—reflecting a President's personal and political philosophy, a President's experience and knowledge, a President's aspirations and a President's response to the demands that were made on him.

I have not written these chapters to say, "This is how it was," but to say, "This is how I saw it from my vantage point." Neither have I attempted to cover all the events of my Administration. I have selected what I consider to be the most important problems, the most pressing goals and the most his-

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toric accomplishments of my years as President.

Finally, I have tried to avoid engaging in historical pamphleteering. I did not set out to write a propaganda piece in support of my decisions. My purpose has been to state the problems that I faced as President, to record the facts as they came to me, to list the alternatives available and to review what I did and why I did it. Others will have to judge the results on their merits. The struggle in Vietnam, for example, inspired one of the most passionate and deeply felt debates in our nation's life. That debate will go on, no matter what is written in these pages. History will make its judgments on the decisions made and the actions taken.

LYNDON B. JOHNSON

Johnson City, Tex.
April, 1971

THE BEGINNING

"W E'RE going to carry two states next year if we don't carry any others: Massachusetts and Texas."

The speaker was John F. Kennedy. The time was Friday morning, Nov. 22, 1963.

I had gone to the President's eighth-floor suite in the Hotel Texas in Fort Worth to introduce my younger sister, Lucia Alexander, to him. The President's spirits were high. He had come to Texas for politics, and the trip so far was successful—much more successful than I had expected. He had been warmly received everywhere he went. The crowds in San Antonio and Houston on the previous day had been large and enthusiastic.

That morning in Fort Worth he had

already made two speeches, one to a large gathering in a parking lot across the street from the hotel and another to a Chamber of Commerce breakfast in the hotel. Money and power were represented at the breakfast, but the parking lot audience—made up of workers, mothers and children—gave me more assurance about the mood of Texas. Many of them had waited in a steady drizzle for more than an hour to hear him and to see Mrs. Kennedy.

"Where's Jackie?" someone in the crowd shouted.

"Mrs. Kennedy is organizing herself," the President said. "It takes longer, but of course she looks better than we do when she does it." The crowd loved this and roared its approval.

Now it was time to leave for Dallas. John Kennedy was thinking about the future, about the approaching Presidential campaign and the necessity for carrying Texas. No one, including the President, considered his re-election to be a cinch. In fact, the President's ratings in the polls were as low as they had ever been. But his reception thus far in Texas seemed to disprove the polls, and this fact was very much on President Kennedy's mind. The polls may have given him cause for gloom, but the people certainly did not.

That was obviously what he was thinking about when he remarked to me, cheerfully, that we would at least carry Massachusetts and Texas. They were the last words John Kennedy ever spoke to me.

I was just going out the door when he said this. I turned and smiled at him. "Oh, we are going to do better than that, Mr. President," I replied. He returned the smile and nodded.

On that note I left the room, pulling the door shut behind me, and went to join Lady Bird for the motorcade trip to Air Force II, which would take us to Dallas.

I shared the President's optimism that

morning and I shared the sense of implied partnership in the coming campaign. Reports had been circulating in Washington that I was going to be "dumped" from the ticket in 1964. In fact, the Nov. 22 edition of The Dallas Morning News quoted Richard Nixon as predicting that under certain circumstances I would be "dumped." I believed these reports to be rumors and nothing more.

When John Kennedy first offered me the Vice-Presidential nomination, I asked him to be candid with me. If it was only a courteous gesture, I said, I wanted him to say so. He replied that he needed me to run with him if the ticket was to be successful.

For me, President Kennedy made his position quite clear in what was to be his next-to-last press conference, on Oct. 31, 1963, only 22 days before his death. He was asked: "Now, sir, assuming that you run next year, would you want Lyndon Johnson on the ticket and do you expect he will be on the ticket?" The President answered without hesitation: "Yes, to both of those questions. That is correct."

I considered President Kennedy a great and inspiring national leader and a compassionate man of vision and imagination. I was honored to serve him. My personal feelings toward him were those of admiration, fondness and respect—and I always believed that those feelings were returned in kind by the President.

Now, in Texas on this November day, Lady Bird and I were going to have a chance to return his hospitality. We were scheduled to fly that afternoon from Dallas to Austin for a fund-raising dinner. That night the Kennedys were going to be our guests at the LBJ Ranch. We were eagerly looking forward to the visit. The President had visited our ranch before but Mrs. Kennedy had not. I was particularly anxious for her to enjoy herself, and knowing how she liked to ride, we had made special plans for some of our best horses to be available for her.

MRS. JOHNSON and I arrived at Dallas's Love Field aboard Air Force II at 11:35 A.M. We were greeted by the local dignitaries and immediately joined the reception line to welcome the First Family when Air Force I touched down five minutes later.

There was a large, joyful crowd behind the fence, and when the Kennedys stepped out of the plane a great roar

went up from thousands of throats. I remember thinking how radiant Mrs. Kennedy looked.

After the formalities, President and Mrs. Kennedy walked along the fence, shaking hands and stopping to sign autographs. Lady Bird and I followed, shaking hands and exchanging greetings with old friends in the crowd. Ten minutes later we took seats in the automobiles to begin the motorcade through town to the Trade Mart, where the President was scheduled to make a luncheon speech. President and Mrs. Kennedy got into the big Presidential Lincoln. Gov. John Connally of Texas

and his wife, Nellie, were in the jump seats directly in front of them. On orders of the President, the famous "bubble top" had been removed from the car. It was a beautiful day and the President wanted no barriers between himself and the people.

Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry led the motorcade in his car. Then came the Presidential limousine, the Secret Service follow-up car and the Vice-Presidential car, a rented Lincoln convertible. Behind us were several cars for members of Congress, press cars, a V.I.P. bus and finally the press buses. In the front seat of our car were the driver, a Texas highway patrolman named Hurchel Jacks, and the Secret Service agent in charge of my detail, Rufus Youngblood. I was sitting in the right rear seat, Lady Bird was in the center and Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas was in the left rear seat, directly behind the driver. It was approximately 11:55 A.M.

As we drove through the less populated areas, the crowds were thin. Closer to town the crowds grew in size as well as in spirit. In some places they were lined three and four deep along the streets. Children were smiling, waving homemade signs of welcome. People were hanging out of windows, cheering and throwing confetti. The more the crowds grew, the more enthusiastic they became.

My thoughts returned to John Kennedy's earlier comment to me in the hotel. We would carry Texas. If we could get a turnout like this in Dallas, I thought, we could carry the state.

Dallas has never been exactly a citadel of Democratic politics. And I knew from experience what an angry Dallas crowd could be like to an unwelcome visitor. But Dallas put on a different face on the afternoon of Nov. 22.

A great deal has been written about the purpose of that fateful trip to Texas. Much of what has been written is wrong.

President Kennedy came to Texas to raise money for the Democratic campaign coffers and to pave the way for a Democratic victory in Texas in 1964. President Kennedy also came to Texas to try to shore up our slipping popularity there. A Texas poll, taken a few weeks before his trip, showed that only 38 per cent of the people approved of what he was doing as President. The same poll showed Governor Connally with 81 per cent approval. The fact is that Governor Connally was more in tune with the prevailing political thinking in Texas. Some of the Administration's actions—particularly the Bay of Pigs, the fiscal policy and the civil-rights program—had hurt us in Texas and throughout the South.

The idea that President Kennedy came to Texas to settle a political feud between Senator Ralph Yarborough and me is not true. Whatever differences the Senator and I may have had could have been settled in Washington, where neither of us was more than 10 minutes away from the White House. In addition, President Kennedy was too smart to try to intervene in local political con-

troversies.

The difference that Senator Yarborough and I had was over patronage. I had made an agreement with President Kennedy—when he asked me to go on the ticket in Los Angeles—that I would be allowed to pass on all Federal appointments in Texas. Senator Yarborough resented this. If I had been in his position, I might have resented it too. He felt that he should have complete control over those appointments. He knew that other Senators could make recommendations that did not have to be approved by the Vice President and he was not pleased to find that his did.

Senator Yarborough did refuse to ride in the car with us on the previous day in San Antonio and Houston. He never told me that, but I was informed that he told members of the Kennedy staff and President Kennedy was very irritated by it.

As the crowds reached their peak on Main Street, President Kennedy stopped the motorcade several times to shake hands. Whenever he did so, people would surge through the police lines on both sides of the street—from one side to touch their President and from the other side to get a closer look at Mrs. Kennedy.

Shortly before 12:30 P.M. the motorcade turned right on Houston Street and then a block later made a sharp left turn on Elm Street, which would take



us through the underpass and on to Stemmons Freeway to the Trade Mart. We were traveling about 10 or 15 miles per hour. Just after our car made the left turn at the top of Elm, I was startled by an explosion.

In the reading I have done since that day of horror, it is apparent that there were many reactions to the first shot. Some people thought it was a firecracker. Some thought it was a bomb. Some thought it was a truck backfiring. Some thought it might be a shot. Some were positive it was a shot.

I did not know what it was.

Before the echo had subsided, before the noise had completely registered on my consciousness, Agent Youngblood spun around, shoved me on the shoulder to push me down, and shouted to all of us, "Get down!" Almost in the same movement, he vaulted over the seat, pushed me to the floor, and sat on my right shoulder to keep me down and to protect me. "Get down!" he shouted again to all of us. Agent Youngblood's quick reaction was as brave an act as I have ever seen anyone perform. When a man, without a moment's thought or hesitation, places himself between you and a possible assassin's bullet, you know you have seen courage. And you never forget it.

I still was not clear about what was happening. I was bent down under the weight of Agent Youngblood's body, toward Lady Bird and Senator Yarborough, and I remember turning my head to make sure that they were both down. They were. Agent Youngblood had seen to that.

At some time in this sequence of events, I heard other explosions. It was impossible to tell where they were coming from, and I still was not certain what they were. Then a voice came crackling over the radio system: "Let's get out of here!" Suddenly our car accelerated and we wheeled around a corner, careening over the curb—almost, it seemed to me, on two wheels. I was later told that we were traveling between 70 and 80 miles per hour.

There was some frantic conversation coming over Youngblood's radio and I heard him speaking into it several times. But I could not distinguish the words. I asked him what had happened. He released his weight from me but still kept me in a crouching position on the floor. He said that he was not sure but that he had heard that the motorcade was headed for a hospital.

FROM that first moment Rufus Youngblood had taken charge. He was determined, and there was a tone of authority in his voice to back it up. "When we get to the hospital," he instructed, "you and Mrs. Johnson follow me and the other agents." He said that we were going in fast and we were not to become involved with any other people.

"All right," I replied, and it seemed that as soon as I said it the car was braking and people were jumping out. When Lady Bird and I got out, we were immediately surrounded by agents. Youngblood ordered us to follow them

into the building, to stay close to them and not to stop under any circumstances. We followed, almost in a trot. Our entrance into the hospital, I later learned, had started a rumor, which the press circulated throughout the nation, that I was having a heart attack and was being rushed to the emergency area for treatment. We were taken to a very small room in the hospital, lined with white sheets.

Our first specific information came from Emory Roberts, the agent in charge of the White House detail. He said that President Kennedy had been wounded by gunshot and that his condition was quite serious. He added that Governor Connally had also been injured. I was stunned. My President and leader . . . my confidant and friend . . . both shot; both undergoing emergency treatment

just yards from where I stood; both, for all I knew, dying. The day, which had begun so cheerfully, had turned into a nightmare.

The Secret Service now decided that we should leave the hospital and make plans to return to Washington immediately.

Agent Youngblood concurred. He said that no one knew whether the shooting was the work of one man or several men, or was part of a conspiracy to kill the top leadership of the country. "We need to get back to Washington—the White House will be the safest place for you," he said.

I replied that it would be unthinkable for me to leave with President Kennedy's life hanging in the balance. And under any circumstances, the decision should be made by someone on the President's staff.

The reports on the President's condition became more discouraging by the minute. Agent Emory Roberts came in and said the President would not make it.

I sent for Secret Service Agent Roy Kellerman for a report on John Connally's condition. He said that the Governor had been taken to surgery but that he was expected to recover.

My thoughts turned to Jacqueline Kennedy and Nellie Connally. They were both going through this heart-breaking experience alone, and I didn't see how they could stand up under the agony. I asked Agent Youngblood if Mrs. Johnson and I could walk down the corridor and try to see them. He shook his head emphatically, insisting that I was not to leave the room. He did say, however, that it would be all right for Mrs. Johnson to go. "You ought to try to see Jackie and Nellie," I told her. She started out to find them immediately, escorted by Congressman Brooks and several Secret Service agents.

About 1:20 P.M. Kenneth O'Donnell, the President's appointments secretary, informed us of the President's death. "He's gone," was all he said.

I found it hard to believe that this nightmare had actually happened. The violence of the whole episode was un-

real, shocking and incredible. A few hours earlier I had been having breakfast with John Kennedy—alive, young, strong and vigorous. I could not believe that he was dead. I was bewildered and distraught. Along with grief I felt anguish, compassion and a deep concern for Mrs. Kennedy and the children.

But despite our emotions, there were practical matters to attend to—and the most urgent matter, as far as the Secret Service was concerned, was getting me out of that hospital to a place where I could be better protected. Agent Roberts went to find Ken O'Donnell for further instructions. O'Donnell thought that we should depart for Washington immediately.

I asked what Mrs. Kennedy wanted to do. O'Donnell replied that Mrs. Kennedy would not leave the hospital without the President's body. He said that they were waiting for a casket. I could not desert Mrs. Kennedy in that situation and emphatically said so. I told O'Donnell that I would not return to Washington until Mrs. Kennedy was ready to go, and that we would carry the President's body back with us if that was what she wanted. I did agree to go immediately to Air Force I and to wait there until Mrs. Kennedy and the President's body were brought aboard the plane.

Just a minute or so before we left—it must have been about 1:30 P.M.—Assistant Press Secretary Malcolm Kilduff came into the room and addressed me as "Mr. President." This was the first time anyone had called me that and I must have looked startled; I certainly felt strange.

"Mr. President," he said, "I have to announce the death of President Ken-

nedey. Is it all right with you if the public announcement is made now?"

I suppose I naturally assumed that the announcement had already been made. On brief reflection I concluded that it would be best to make the announcement after we had left the hospital, purely for security reasons. I told Kilduff, and he and the Secret Service agreed.

Our departure from the hospital was similar to our arrival: swift and tense. The Secret Service agents had obtained three unmarked cars from the Dallas police. The same instructions were grimly conveyed to Mrs. Johnson and me: "We're going to move out fast. Please stick close to us."

We left the room, ushered—or I should say, surrounded—by a cordon of agents. Agent Youngblood insisted that Lady Bird and I travel in different cars. I sat in the rear seat of the lead car, driven by Dallas Police Chief Curry. Congressman Thornberry got in the front seat. Rufus Youngblood followed me into the car and told me to keep my head below window level. Mrs. Johnson was ushered into the second car with Congressman Brooks and several agents. There was a follow-up car with the remaining agents.

THE JOURNEY to Love Field took less than 10 minutes, but those few minutes were as crucial as any I have ever spent. I knew from the moment President Kennedy died that I must assume the awesome responsibility of uniting the country and moving toward the goals that he had set for us. Like everyone else, I continued to be stunned.

I realized that, ready or not, new and immeasurable duties had been thrust upon me. There were tasks to perform that only I had the authority to perform. A nation stunned, shaken to its very heart, had to be reassured that the Government was not in a state of paralysis.

I realized that the staff and Secret Service had been right in insisting that I go to Air Force I immediately. That plane is the closest thing to a traveling White House that man can devise. It affords the personnel, the security and the communications equipment a President must have to do his job.

At first Mrs. Johnson and I were ushered into the private quarters of the plane, which contained a bedroom and bathroom for the use of the President and his family. I told one of the agents that we preferred that these quarters be held for Mrs. Kennedy's use and we went forward to the crowded stateroom, which serves as the Presidential office and sitting room aboard the plane.

When I walked in, everyone stood up. It was at that moment that I realized nothing would ever be the same again. A wall—high, forbidding, historic—separated us now, a wall that derives from the office of the Presidency of the United States. No one but my family would ever penetrate it as long as I held the office. To old friends who had never called me anything but Lyndon, I would now be "Mr. President." It was a frightening, disturbing prospect.

I knew I had to call Attorney General Robert Kennedy immediately. I went back into the bedroom for a few minutes to use the phone because it was the only private place on the plane where I could speak quietly and be able to hear.

I knew how grief-stricken the President's brother must have been and I tried to say something that would comfort him. In spite of his shock and sorrow he discussed the practical problems at hand with dispatch. We discussed the matter of my taking the oath of office. I told him that both the Secret Service and the members of the late President's staff felt that I should return to Washington at once.

Attorney General Kennedy said he would look into the matter and report



Associated Press

After President Kennedy's assassination in Dallas on the afternoon of Nov. 22, Mr. Johnson was sworn in on Air Force I by Judge Sarah T. Hughes as Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Kennedy stood by his side.

7, 1963-69'

to me on whether the oath should be administered immediately or after we returned to Washington. He also said that he would provide us with the proper wording of the oath.

The Attorney General said [later] that the oath of office should be administered immediately—before taking off for Washington—and that it could be administered by any judicial officer of the United States. The next call came from Deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, calling, I presumed, at the Attorney General's direction. He dictated the wording of the oath of office to my personal secretary, Marie Fehmer.

I then called Irving Goldberg, a lawyer friend for many years. We agreed that Judge Sarah Hughes, whom President Kennedy had appointed to the United States District Court in Dallas, should be asked to administer the oath. Goldberg telephoned Judge Hughes at her office. She was not there but was expected in momentarily, and a few minutes later she called me. I explained the situation and told her that we would send a car for her immediately. She replied that she could get to the airfield faster on her own and would be there in 10 minutes.

About 2:15 the moment arrived against which I had been steeling myself—and dreading to the depths of my being. Mrs. Kennedy was coming aboard with the President's body. Lady Bird and I went to the rear of the plane to meet her. I had not seen Mrs. Kennedy since morning, when we had gotten into our cars at the airport to begin the motorcade. I was shocked by the sight that confronted me. There stood that beautiful lady, with her white gloves, her pink suit, and her stockings caked with her husband's blood. There was a dazed look in her eyes.

I do not remember much of the conversation. It was not really a conversation, just clumsy, aching words of condolence and some half-finished, choked sentences in reply. Nothing anybody can say under such circumstances is the right thing to say, because no words can ever ease the pain. Men are not very good at such things. It was Lady Bird who said the most and whose words were the most comforting, and Mrs. Kennedy replied: "Oh, Lady Bird, we've always liked you both so much." She seemed to be trying to offer us words of strength.

We saw her to the bedroom and then left her alone. Privacy seemed the only kindness at such a time. The casket was brought up the ramp and placed in the rear of the plane.

I asked Larry O'Brien to find out if Mrs. Kennedy wished to stand with us during the administration of the oath. A moment later she came out to join us

—she standing on one side of me and Lady Bird on the other.

At approximately 2:40 P.M. Malcolm Kilduff held a dictating machine in front of us (a tape recorder was not available) and I repeated the oath of office after Judge Hughes:

"I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States, so help me God."

Within five minutes we were airborne, headed back to Washington. While in the air I called President Kennedy's mother, Mrs. Rose Kennedy, in Massachusetts. I told her of our grief and our sorrow for her. And then she, as Jacqueline Kennedy had done a few minutes earlier, had the thoughtfulness

to say something to strengthen me. "Thank you very much," she replied. "I know you loved Jack and he loved you."

I SENT for Maj. Gen. Chester V. Clifton, the military aide to the President, and told him that I would want to meet with three groups as soon as possible after I got to the White House. First, I wanted to hold a Cabinet meeting. I realized then that most of the Cabinet members, including the Secretary of State, were on their way to Japan for a conference. I gave orders for them to return immediately and was told that their plane had turned around as soon as word of the assassination had been received. The plane was refueling in Hawaii at that moment. The Cabinet meeting would have to wait until the following day.

The second meeting I requested was with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and McGeorge Bundy, the President's national security adviser. I felt a national security meeting was essential at the earliest possible moment. Finally, I wanted a meeting with the bipartisan leadership of the Congress. I told General Clifton to have Bundy set up both meetings for that same evening.

With this business out of the way, I returned to the rear of the plane and asked the members of the Kennedy staff if they would like to come up and join us. They thanked me but declined. They wanted to share their grief together and to draw whatever strength they might from each other's company.

If there was friction aboard the plane, I was not aware of it, and neither was my staff.

We landed at Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington about 6 P.M. There was a cluster of people waiting and watching as we pulled up to the parking ramp.

As we pulled to a stop, a ramp was brought up to the front door and a forklift to the rear. Both doors were opened. I instructed my staff to wait, saying that none of us should leave until the casket was off and Mrs. Kennedy had deplaned.

When the time came, Lady Bird and I walked down the ramp, with the blinding lights in our eyes and the cameras following us. I walked slowly up to the microphones and made the following statement:

"This is a sad time for all people. We have suffered a loss that cannot be weighed. For me, it is a deep personal tragedy. I know that the world shares the sorrow that Mrs. Kennedy and her family bear. I will do my best. That is all I can do. I ask for your help—and God's."

From the book "The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969," by Lyndon Baines Johnson, to be published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc. © 1971 HEC Public Affairs Foundation.

Tomorrow: The Vietnam war, 1963-64, and Kennedy's policy