

# 'Five Terrible Seconds' Proved Fatal To JFK

NEW YORK (AP) — "Five terrible seconds" may have spelled the difference between life or death for President John F. Kennedy after he was first wounded, William Manchester suggests in his book, "The death of a President."

This is the estimated elapsed time between the first and second bullets that struck Kennedy.

Referring to the Secret Service agents riding in the front seat of the presidential car in that awful moment, Manchester wrote:

"They were in a position to take evasive action after the first shot, but for five terrible seconds, they were immobilized."

The first bullet, piercing Kennedy's neck and throat, was not fatal the author wrote. But the second inflicted a massive wound on the right side of his skull, sealing his fate.

The second installment of Look magazine's four-part serialization of Manchester's book, on the newsstands Wednesday, relates the events of the day of the assassination, Nov. 22, 1963.

When the first shot cracked, Manchester wrote, "the White House detail was confused." Agents thought the sound came from a firecracker, or a police motorcycle backfire.

Agent Roy Kellerman, in the front seat, thought he heard the President say, "My God, I'm hit," and turned to look at him. Agent William R. Greer, the driver, also glanced backward.

"Neither had yet reacted to the crisis," Manchester wrote.

Kennedy was clutching his throat but he was not grimacing. Manchester described his expression as "quizzical." Mrs. Kennedy had often seen that expression. Like the others in the car, she seemed unaware that her husband had been wounded.

Then the second bullet struck him. Manchester wrote —

"Now in a gesture of infinite grace, he raised his right hand as though to brush back his tousled chestnut hair. But the motion faltered. The hand fell back limply. He had been reaching for the top of his head. But it wasn't there any more."

At about that same instant, Agent Rufus Youngblood vaulted into the rear seat of Vice President Johnson's car, snapped, "get down," and covered Johnson's body with his own.

The lead cars in the motorcade, accelerating powerfully, then raced toward Parkland Hospital in Dallas, where, Manchester wrote, they were to find confusion compounded.

In this section of his book, Manchester leaves no doubt that he believes Lee Harvey Oswald killed Kennedy and had no accomplices in any organized conspiracy.

The author thus agrees with the findings of the Warren commission. It says Oswald acted alone.

Critics of the Warren report, however, have advanced the theory in numerous books — some of them lucrative — that the bullets came from two directions, not just the Texas School Book Depository Building, where Oswald worked.

Manchester wrote that Oswald smuggled his rifle into the Book Depository Building, built a "sniper's perch" near a sixth-floor window, and then waited for the presidential motorcade.

A witness, Howard Brennan, told the Warren commission he saw Oswald, only 88 yards from Kennedy's car, and aiming through a telescopic sight on the rifle, fire at the President. Manchester cites Brennan's testimony.

To refute the "conspiracy school" of writers, Manchester also cites the evidence in the photographs and x-rays taken during the autopsy on Kennedy's body. He says he did not see this material but that he interviewed three persons "with special qualifications" who examined it before it was sealed in the national archives.

"None of them knew the other two, but all three gave identical accounts of what they had seen in the photographs and X-rays," Manchester wrote. The evidence is "overwhelming," he says, that the first bullet struck Kennedy in the lower neck, exited from his throat, and then struck Gov. John B. Connally Jr. of

Texas, who was riding in the jump seat in front of Kennedy.

The second installment also reports:

1. Kennedy, perhaps in a flash of prescience, talked about being assassinated on the morning of the day he died. He told Mrs. Kennedy an assassin in the crowd at Fort Worth the previous night easily could have shot him. He pantomimed for her the actions of the imaginary killer. He spoke "casually," Manchester wrote, and Mrs. Kennedy took his remarks in that spirit.

2. Kenneth O'Donnell, special aide to Kennedy, disagrees completely with President Johnson in their memories of the circumstances through which Johnson boarded the presidential airplane, instead of the vice presidential aircraft, after the assassination.

Johnson recalls that O'Donnell "twice urged" him to take Air Force One, the presidential plane, for the flight to Washington.

Manchester says O'Donnell calls this version "absolutely, totally and unequivocally wrong." He quotes O'Donnell as adding, "The President and I had no conversation regarding Air Force One. If we had known that he was going on Air Force One, we would have taken Air Force Two. One plane was just like another."

3. Kennedy had come to Texas to patch up a political feud involving Sen. Ralph Yarborough, Gov. Connally and Johnson, Manchester wrote. On the previous day, Yarborough had twice refused to ride in Johnson's car.

Manchester describes the

shock, terror and pandemonium in the presidential car when the second shot struck Kennedy and when Connally, in a delayed reaction, discovered that he had been wounded. He began screaming.

Mrs. Kennedy, shocked and unaware of what she was doing, climbed on the trunk of the car just as Greer, the driver, began accelerating at full power. She might have been killed. Agent Clint Hill had jumped from Johnson's car to a footrest on the left rear of Kennedy's car and grabbed her hand.

Manchester wrote that Mrs. Kennedy, in a "strangled" voice, was saying, "He's dead — they've killed him — Oh, Jack, oh, Jack, I love you."

As the cars raced toward Parkland Hospital, the police tried by radio to alert the staff there. But, Manchester wrote, the dispatcher's radio was not working properly.

Thus, when they arrived, "There wasn't a hospital attendant in sight." The Secret Service agents were "aghast" and yelled, "Get us two stretchers on wheels."

Mrs. Kennedy was cradling her husband's bloody head against her breast and would not let go when the agents tried to move him to the stretcher, Manchester wrote. He quoted her as saying, "No, Mr. Hill.

You know he's dead. Let me alone."

Hill removed his coat and covered the stricken man's head with it. Only then did Mrs. Kennedy relax her grip.

Secret Service agents, meanwhile, were fully alert to the possibility of a wide-ranging conspiracy, perhaps aimed at top government officials.