The Man at the Dallas Airport: November 22, 1963

FOOTNOTE TO HISTORY

BY JACK HARRISON POLLACK

ILLUSTRATED BY MORT ROSENFELD

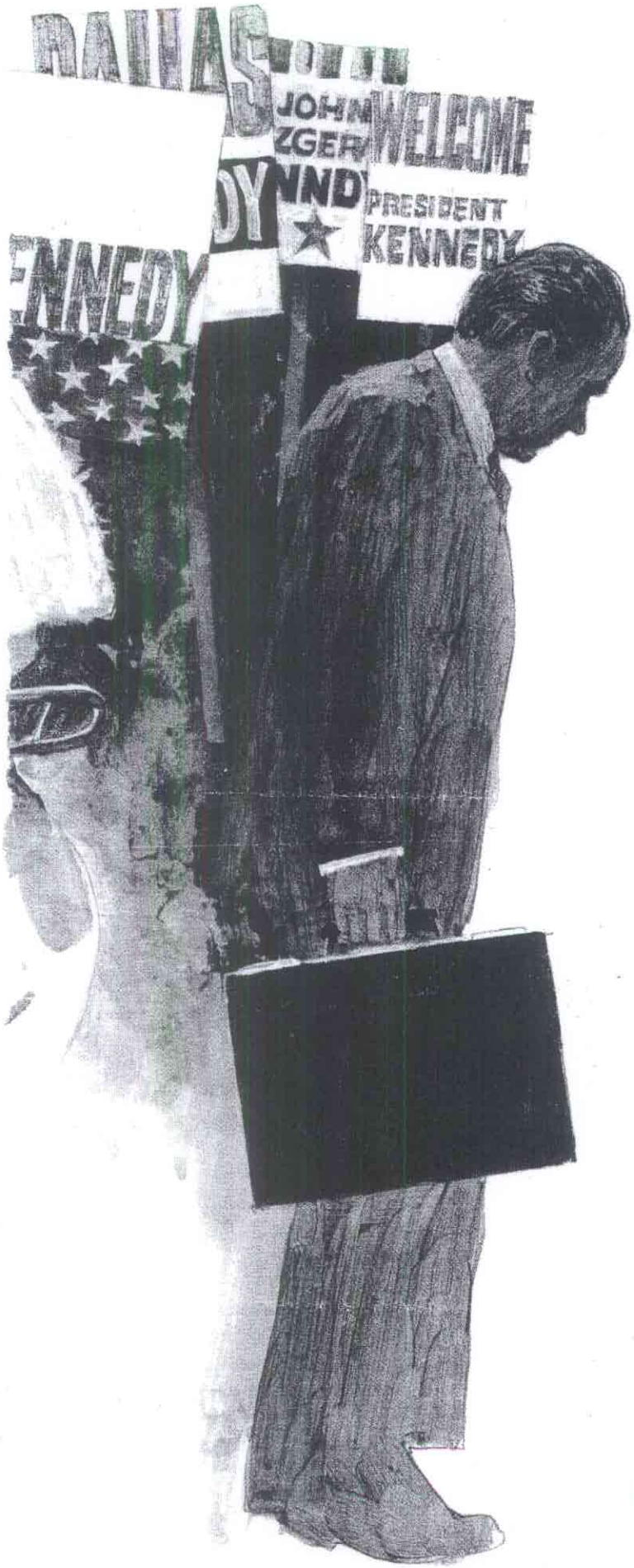
At Dallas' Love Field on Friday morning, November 22, 1963, the lonely man was waiting for a plane to fly him back to New York. His black case contained his legal papers, pajamas, shaver, toothbrush and two soiled white shirts. He stood alone.

Elsewhere at the airport, in the blazing sun, a boisterous throng was eagerly awaiting the arrival in two hours of the man's greatest political rival—one whom he could never forget. For this rival, the banners were now waving and the bands blaring. But no one was paying much attention to the lonely man. He was one of history's biggest losers.

In all likelihood, he wished that the banners and bands would go away. They must have been a painful sight, causing a deep inner hurt.

Through a strange twist of fate, he had flown to Dallas two days earlier and had stayed at the downtown Baker Hotel. His mission was to advise a lucrative new client of the law firm with which he had recently become associated.

The client company was holding its annual two-day convention. A thorny top-management decision loomed. The day before, the Man at the Airport had scribbled on his yellow legal pad several paragraphs suggesting how the company president could word a delicate statement more judiciously.



Did Nixon forget or merely neglect to inform the FBI that he was in Dallas on the day JFK was assassinated? . . . Can any adult American fail to remember where he was that tragic day?

"Save his notes—I want them back," the company president had instructed an aide.

National rather than company politics interested the man soon to board the New York-bound plane. At a company reception the night before, he had dutifully pumped the hands of many of the corporation's 810 delegates. Yet as the company's hired outside legal adviser, officially he was obscure.

The afternoon before, the anonymous traveler had held an informal press conference in his hotel suite, even though a year earlier—on a bitterly humiliating occasion—he had vowed never again to do so. The United Press and other media reported what he said on that afternoon of November 21, 1963: "I hope that President Kennedy will receive a courteous reception in Dallas. . . . Just because you may disagree with his views is no excuse for discourtesy towards the President of the United States. . . . I think Kennedy will only keep Lyndon Johnson as his running mate in 1964 if he believes the election is a shoo-in. . . . Otherwise, he will choose someone who can help the Democratic ticket more. . . . Lyndon was chosen in 1960 because it was thought he could help the ticket in the South. . . . But now he is a political liability in the South just as in the North. . . . Kennedy will probably dump him for someone who can help the ticket more. . . . Kennedy has promised more than he can deliver. . . . The Republican nominee in 1964 must hit hard on the Kennedy record of nonachievement in Cuba, Southeast Asia and Latin America. . . . I'm going to work as hard as I can to get the Kennedys out of the White House and Washington. . . . The United States can't afford four more years of that kind of administration."

At an airport newsstand, he purchased a Dallas *Morning News* in which he read most of his (*Continued on page* 122)

DALLAS AIRPORT (Continued from page 35)
quoted comments in a back-section article by Carl Freund.

Alone, he walked to the departure gate and boarded American Airlines Flight 82 at 9:05 a.m. Central Standard Time (10:05 a.m. Eastern Standard Time), bound for what was then known as Idlewild Airport in New York.

After he boarded, a stewardess, noting his name on the manifest, rushed up to inform the captain. During the routine three-hour flight, he read, dozed and peered out the window.

At 1:12 p.m. (EST) his plane landed. Spotted by newsmen and photographers at Idlewild, he cheerfully repeated his day-earlier prediction that JFK would dump LBJ, amiably posed for several quick pictures and strode swiftly to a waiting taxicab.

What occurred shortly afterward, at 1:30 p.m. (EST), America can never forget. John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 35th President of the United States, was senselessly slain on the streets of Dallas. The man who had just alighted from the plane in New York had left those very streets less than four hours earlier. It was an almost classic irony, a fateful jest of the ancient gods.

The man at the airport was, of course, Richard Milhous Nixon.

His taxicab stopped at a traffic light in the borough of Queens, en route to Manhattan. "President Kennedy was shot!" shouted a male passerby. Instantly, the cab driver switched on the radio and, with his visibly shaken passenger, heard the nation's Chief Executive had been seriously wounded in the head.

Thirty-five minutes later, Richard Nixon reached his elegant Manhattan apartment building at Fifth Avenue and 62nd Street, on the most exclusive margin of Central Park. Though he generally exchanged polite small talk with the doorman, he did not reply when the doorman informed him that the President had died. He had just heard the news on the taxi radio.

Silently, he took the elevator to his 12-room, five-bath co-op apartment on the fifth floor. By then, the building's other residents—who included New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller and publisher William Randolph Hearst Jr.—had heard that the man to whom Richard Nixon had narrowly lost the presidency was dead.

Above a fireplace in the Nixon apartment hung an oil painting by Dwight D. Eisenhower. Nixon picked up the phone and dialed his former boss at the Waldorf Towers. But the ailing former President was taking his afternoon nap and had left instructions that he was not to be disturbed. Ike's former White House aide, General Robert Schulz, informed the man who had been Vice President of the United States for eight years that General Eisenhower would call him back when he awoke. Ike later did.

Nixon then dialed the private Washington office telephone number of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, whom he had first met when investigating the Alger Hiss case, 16 years earlier.

Hoover, very much awake and alert to the developments, informed him that a right-wing crackpot had not done it, but a man with Russian and Castro connections.

Meanwhile, three other people had arrived at the Nixon apartment: Rose Mary Woods, his devoted private secretary since 1950; television producer Paul Keyes of the Jack Paar show, a former comedy writer who frequently made Nixon laugh; and speechwriter-author Stephen Hess, who had rushed over from lunch at the Century Club where he and Doubleday editor Kenneth D. McCormick had discussed a proposed book on the forthcoming 1964 Presidential campaign which Nixon was to byline as a sequel to his highly successful *Six Crises*.

Nixon removed a clipping from his case and showed it to the visitors. It was from that morning's Dallas *News* and quoted him as having urged courtesy toward the President of the United States. "It was his way of saying," recollects Hess, " 'Look, I didn't have anything to do with this awful thing.' "

Hess, now on the Brookings Institution staff in Washington after a 1969-70 White House stint, drafted a statement which his host quickly read and approved: "The assassination of the President is a terrible tragedy for the nation. Mrs. Nixon and I have sent a personal message expressing our deepest sympathy to members of the family in this hour of sorrow."

Shortly afterward, Manalo Sanchez, who with his wife Fina comprised the Nixons' household help, served a tray of drinks for the guests. In an apparent attempt to calm his nerves, Nixon drifted into his pine-paneled study. Seeking a solitude that he must have known was impossible, he sat down at his uncluttered desk and began composing a more personal letter to the President's widow. It was a difficult letter for him to write. Lost in contemplation, he tried to organize the perhaps scattered thoughts now racing through his generally coherent mind.

His thoughts may have drifted back to Washington in January 1947, when he had first met the junior congressman from Massachusetts. Both were obscure, ambitious, hardworking freshmen serving on the House Labor Committee. In April of that year of Truman's presidency, they held their first "debate" on the controversial Tart-Hartley labor bill in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, and later took a night train back to Washington together.

The rise in their respective careers had often followed parallel lines. Both were pragmatic realists. Seated at his desk, Nixon may now have recalled how some of JFK's critics had sneered at Joe Kennedy's boy as a "Democratic Nixon."

Other memories

conceivably passed through his mind. For example, the time when Senator Kennedy had returned to Congress in May 1955 after being in the hospital for six months with a bad back, and he had sent JFK a large basket of fruit with the greeting: "Welcome home! Dick Nixon." And then there were the 1960 debates. Understandably, they may have summoned up some bitter memories. If he hadn't agreed to them, he might have won the election. The vote had been close, and there had been reports of fraud in Texas and Illinois, but he didn't contest the election because it would have thrown the government into chaos. A week after the election, Kennedy had flown down by helicopter from Palm Beach to see him in Key Biscayne. It was a nice visit and Kennedy had even vaguely offered him a job.

"Dear Mrs. Kennedy," he began writing. He told her that the President's death was not only a tragic loss to her, her family, the nation and world, but to him personally. He wrote that he had been as friendly with JFK as the President had been with any Republican. He noted wryly that it was a pity they had been fated to be political foes. He expressed his deep admiration for her husband's intelligence, ability, charm, wit and charisma. For an introverted man, it was an emotional, revealing letter. Again and again, it must have crossed his mind: "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

Returning to the living room, he asked Rose Mary Woods to cancel all his appointments for the coming week including his next day's golf date with former New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey and Roger Blough, U.S. Steel board chairman.

He rejoined Stephen Hess and Paul Keyes who had been riveted to the color television set. Later in the afternoon, he discussed with them and other visitors the assassination's political aspects. His opinion: the new President Lyndon Johnson and the slain Chief Executive's brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, would become so embroiled in internecine warfare that Adlai Stevenson would again emerge as the 1964 Democratic presidential candidate. However, by the following morning, he had correctly concluded that LBJ was in such tight command that the Texan undoubtedly would be the party's nominee. Leonard Hall and other GOP politicos dropped in to discuss Nixon's political resurrection.

On that rainy Saturday afternoon, as gloom deepened over a bereaved nation, he flew to Washington with his wife. After checking into a nearby hotel, he and Pat Nixon visited the White House to pay their respects at the closed casket. On Sunday, they watched the caisson leaving with the coffin that was to lie in state at the Capitol rotunda. On Monday they attended the funeral services at St. Matthew's Cathedral and the burial in Arlington National Cemetery.

What if Richard Nixon had been elected President in 1960 instead of John F. Kennedy? Many people then speculated on whether he would have met a similar tragic fate—if not in Dallas, elsewhere. Nixon's own logic made such speculations invalid. Three years after the assassination, he philosophically admitted to newspaper reporter Jules Witcover, now of the Washington *Post:* "I think it would not have happened to me. No two men are in the same place at the same time . . . events would have been different and would have had a different impact on the man [Oswald]. . . . I've never had any sense of fear or trepidation or superstition. . . . I'm somewhat of a fatalist. I've always felt you keep churning away."

Be that as it may, shortly after the assassination former Vice President Nixon learned that Lee Harvey Oswald had once wanted to kill him, too. This was revealed in the February 1964 testimony given the Warren Commission by Oswald's widow Marina and his brother Robert.

Richard Nixon himself freely cooperated with the Warren Commission. He was not one of the 552 persons called to testify, and hence was never cross-examined. He was, however, interviewed privately by Assistant FBI Director John F. Malone on February 24, 1964—three months after the assassination.

This informal interview took place in Nixon's 24th-floor sanctum in the legal offices of Nixon, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie and Alexander. Afterward, Malone returned to his own office at 201 East 69th Street and wrote his succinct report. It was later incorporated as Exhibit 1973 on page 831, Volume 23, of the 26-volume *Hearings on the President's Commission of the Assassination of President Kennedy,* which was released by the U.S. government in Washington, D.C., on November 23, 1964. This is the complete text:

"On February 28, 1964, the Honorable Richard M. Nixon, former Vice President of the United States, was contacted by Assistant Director in Charge of the New York Office, John F. Malone, and furnished the following information:

"Mr. Nixon advised that the only time he was in Dallas, Texas, during 1963 was two days prior to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. He vaguely thought there was some invitation extended during the early part of 1963, probably in April, for him to come to Dallas, but that it never materialized, nor did he give any consideration to going there. Mr. Nixon could not even recall the circumstances surrounding the invitation, but did observe that conceivably there could have been some publicity indicating that he had been invited to come to Dallas. Mr. Nixon said that if anything more concrete comes to his mind or after his secretary checks his records which would indicate the circumstances surrounding this, he would immediately notify the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). He did say positively that he had no intention of visiting Dallas during April 1963."

Two months earlier, on September 25, 1964, the more widely circulated one-volume *Report on the President's Commission of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy* reported in a summary of the Commission's conclusions: "Mr. Nixon advised the Commission that the only time he was in Dallas in 1963 was on November 20-21, 1963."

Similarly, the even more popular (1,600,000 copies) 800-page Bantam Books October 1964 paperback edition of *Report of the Warren Commission* states on page 176: "Mr. Nixon advised the Commission that the only time he was in Dallas in 1963 was on November 20-21, 1963." This mass paperback was prepared in conjunction with the New York *Times* whose four staff members, Anthony Lewis, James Reston, Harrison E. Salisbury and Tom Wicker all wrote special introductory and interpretive material.

On the other hand, at least two other widely read books have a different version of Richard Nixon's whereabouts on the morning of the assassination day.

William Manchester's 1967 *The Death of a President* (Harper & Row) reports on page 117 that Nixon was in Dallas on Friday morning, November 22, 1963, and departed on American Airlines Flight 82 at 9:05 a.m. Central Standard Time.

With similar brevity, Jim Bishop's 1968 book *The Day Kennedy Was Shot* (Funk & Wagnalls) concurs on page 67 that Nixon was on the same American Airlines Flight 82 that Friday morning.

Why this apparent discrepancy?

Did the FBI, the Warren Commission, the Government Printing Office and Bantam Books err in failing to report that the former Vice President was in Dallas on the morning of November 22nd?

Or were authors Manchester and Bishop mistaken in insisting that he had been in Dallas that morning?

The records of American Airlines and the Baker Hotel indicate that Nixon indeed did leave Dallas for New York on that morning plane.

Thus, did lawyer Nixon in all good faith merely forget or neglect to inform the Warren Commission, via the FBI, that he *had* been in Dallas on the morning of November 22nd? Understandably, many of us tend to block out traumatic experiences and memories. But is a failure of memory likely in this instance? Is there any American above high school age who *doesn't* remember exactly where he was that day?

Richard Milhous Nixon, a political beneficiary in some ways of the John F. and later Robert F. Kennedy assassinations may have what Dr. Bruce Mazlish, author of *In Search of Nixon,* calls a "pervasive belief in his own goodness and morality." He is an extraordinarily gifted, enigmatic, aloof, remote, brooding, introspective, complex, contradictory loner. He possesses a genius for self-survival and for conquering six, seven, eight, nine, ten, and more crises.

One such personal crisis occurred on November 22, 1963. Five years later this lonely Man at the Dallas Airport made a successful flight to the White House. **T**

SEX BOOM (*Continued from page 47*)

to everything else. But Ms. Ephron is honest and right. The liberationists have no idea where their program would take us. The movement counsels us to walk off a cliff, in the wish that our society can be kept afloat on feminist hot air.

Demographers, historians, anthropologists and zoologists have observed that both human and animal societies sometimes reach a condition of demoralization in which they have difficulty reproducing. The cause: a group no longer believes in a better world to come. It happened to the French aristocracts before the revolution and the American Indians after the closing of the frontier. European towns faced with starvation and plague, tribes in the Pacific shaken by a Western intrusion on their religious rites—even animals moved to alien conditions—all experienced a crisis of procreation.

To that somber list we may soon be able to add the American intelligentsia. Contrary to popular belief, many influential groups in this society are already failing to reproduce themselves, and the country is now approaching zero population growth. A continuation of this trend would signify a serious national demoralization.

In the most elemental sense, the sex drive is the survival instinct: the primal tie to the future. When people lose faith in themselves and their prospects, they also lose their procreative energy. They commit sexual suicide. They just cannot bear the idea of "bringing children into the world." Such people may indulge in what they call sex. But it is aimless copulation having little to do with the deeper currents of sexuality and love that will carry a community into the future. **T**

* The same M.O. as Bremer!