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Circus-type air

JFK slaying recreated for television movie

By DOUG BEDELL

Staff Writer

A puffing Larry Schiller, microphone in hand, forced his heavy frame down the center of Elm Street screaming directions at the crowd on either side. Women wearing bobby-socks and men in thin ties careened in mock hys-

teria, falling over each other with every crack of his voice from the booming speakers.

The assassination of President John F. Kennedy, re-enacted on a blistering July 4 weekend for the TV movie "The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald," brought back haunting memories of a cooler day — November 22, 1963.

Schiller's voice boomed like a circus barker's in the center ring. Suddenly all was still.

"You folks are fantastic," the bearded supervising producer yelled to the crowd, which was costumed in cumbersome raincoats — despite the 101-degree heat — to look like the late fall crowds in 1963.

"This is better than Spartacus," he said. "Great."

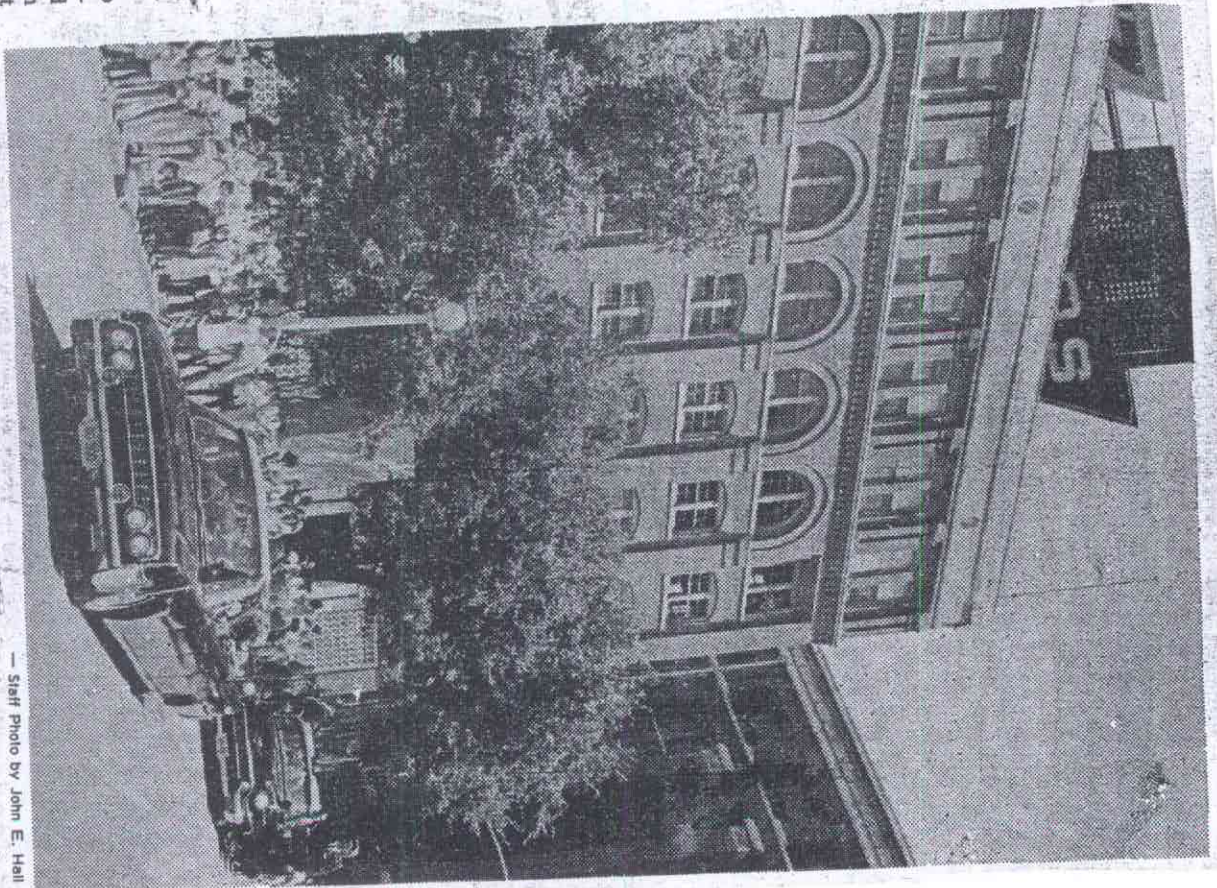
Smiles appeared on faces in the crowd, which then erupted spontaneously into applause.

"Just one thing," Schiller said as the extras brushed themselves off. "Even though you're running, the camera is still catching some of you grinning."

Indeed, the pervasive circus atmosphere that swept across the lush lawn at Dealey Plaza Sunday during the recreation was hard to overcome.

For the 100 or so Dallasites hired to run and fall at Schiller's amplified commands, for the 200 tourists who strained against rope barricades across Elm Street, the series of three shots that rang out constantly during the rehears-

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— Staff Photo by John E. Hall

Presidential motorcade recreated Sunday for TV movie



— Staff Photo by John E. Hall

Actors portraying President Kennedy, his wife Jackie and John Connally in motorcade

Filming creates circus-type air

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als of the motorcade sequence were as far from the events of Nov. 22, 1963 as Hollywood.

Schiller, who began working on this project more than two years ago, and David Greene, the director of "Roots" and "Rich Man, Poor Man," scrambled about the replicas of the motorcade cars fastidiously prepared specially for this four-hour epic. They struggled for authenticity.

Armed with every available picture taken of the dignitaries' cars, the two took the actors through the agonizing actions recorded in the Zapruder film of the assassination, shot from the knoll on the right of the descent to the triple underpass. A young boy rolled on the soft incline just below the mammoth Charles Fries Production movie machine perched where the late Abraham Zapruder stood with his 8mm camera.

Down on the street, Schiller continued to organize the crowd of extras until it portrayed the unorganized gathering which reflected the horror of the assassination in 1963.

"Come on," Schiller urged, whirling his 300-pound body in a circle.

"I'm going to make you all famous." Sweat dripped off his scraggly chin whiskers.

"Bang. You hear it but don't have time to react," he roared.

"Bang. Now you go down, running that way. You realize now it's not a backfire.

"Bang. The motorcade's moving now and you run as if to catch it."

Once it was mapped out to his satisfaction, Schiller ordered the cameras to roll. From the sixth floor of the former Texas Schoolbook depository, a shotgun barrel appeared. The report sent shocks across the plaza over and over for six long hours.

The crowd behind the ropes became more animated each time the gun exploded. Giggles rippled through the breezes from those too young to remember that day.

Only a few in the crowd seemed perturbed that the assassination was again unfolding in front of their eyes.

One man said the movie makers should have left well enough alone. "God would have wanted it that way," said Fermin Garcia. Dick Maxwell, who claims to have viewed the Zapruder film at least 100 times, grumbled that the filmers must not have seen the historic frames because of some discrepancies he noticed.

Between takes, Schiller said it was not his purpose to duplicate that film exactly. "We're here to re-enact it emotionally."

"There's a lot of moments in history that we would rather not recall," he said. "The worst of this one is that John F. Kennedy was shot. The best of it is that we are no longer naive. We are aware of life and death.

"We should not allow the enormity of the event to overshadow the simplicity of the act."

The pace of the motorcade action hit a

faster cadence with each reenactment — the jerk of Kennedy's head, the frantic climb of Jackie Kennedy over the back of the limosine, the leap of the Secret Service man onto the Lincoln to push her back for the rapid ride to Parkland Memorial Hospital.

As 12:29 approached, the cast took its first break and the whirring of the cameras ground to a halt.

The sweating workers took to the shade, chatting and joking, as the time of day that marked Kennedy's death passed.

And while the spectators sauntered away from the make-believe, a lone lady walked her baby in a stroller down main street. She passed the vacant Kennedy Memorial, stopped for a moment as if undecided on whether to enter, then walked back into 1977.

Re-creation of JFK assassination eerie experience for lookalikes

By DOUG BEDELL
Staff Writer

Prior to Sunday, Bob Etheridge's closest link to the tragedy of Nov. 22, 1963, was that in 1972 he installed a burglar alarm system in the Texas School Book Depository Building.

For Bea Thomas, there was not even a vague connection. Her personal fame was selling wigs and rouge for her Lady "B" Enterprises Co.

But for one fleeting minute of celluloid stardom Sunday, Dallasites Etheridge and Mrs. Thomas became Lyndon B. Johnson and Lady Bird Johnson. They became principles in the ABC-TV movie recreation of Kennedy's assassination at Dealey Plaza outside the School Book Depository.

After years of vain attempts to brush off persistent autograph seekers who confused them for their famous counterparts, the two Dallas residents emerged from the make-up sessions Sunday morning to startle the throngs of curious on-lookers at the filming of "The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald."

"Oh, my God," gasped one as the tall, bespectacled Etheridge strode toward another Dallasite, Don Gazzaway, a natural for President Kennedy with his shining reddish-brown hair and broad smile. "This is going to be plum weird."

"It kind of makes you wonder, doesn't it," said Etheridge, an employe of the ADT Co. who in 1972 sold the security system for the infamous building from which assassin Lee Harvey Oswald allegedly fired the fatal shots.

"You know, the day it happened I was watching the parade from in front of the old First National Bank building on Main Street," he said. "I was standing not 10 feet from him when he went by. I could have walked out and touched him. Five minutes later he was dead."

Mrs. Thomas' daughter watched her mother, who still owns the Lady "B" cosmetics firm, trundle about the set

and said, "You know, this is like a dream come true for her. She even has a heart like Lady Bird."

"My father wanted to be here, too. He looks a lot like LBJ, but by the time he called for the role, it had already been filled."

Gazzaway, squinting in the bright morning sun, creasing the familiar-looking crow'sfeet at the corners of his eyes, glanced at the black Continental that soon would carry him repeatedly under the triple underpass. It was being buffed by a host of already-sweaty workers.

"This really is kind of spooky," he said. "It's eerie, you know."

"But I've always wanted to do this. I've always thought I looked like Kennedy."

The day Oswald's Mannlicher-Carcano rifle sent ripples of remorse across the world, Gazzaway was watching television in an ice cream parlor, taking a break from his duties as a bookmobile worker for the Dallas Public Library.

"I remember thinking, 'What a rotten

day for it to have happened!' It was a beautiful day — a lot like today. I remember hearing a plane fly over my home that morning and I said to my wife, 'I wonder if that's Air Force I.'"

Minutes later, Gazzaway was clutching at his throat, falling onto the lap of the pink-clad Christine Rose, who portrays President Kennedy's wife, Jackie, seated beside him in the stationary Continental. Supervising producer Lawrence Schiller mimicks the crack of the rifle and employs, "Feel the pain, the terrific pain — everything."

For six hours, he forces his body into the spasms of a wounded President as recorded in the frames of the Zapruder film.

For six hours, \$25 and a free lunch, Gazzaway and the others move haltingly through a re-enactment of nightmare and the fulfillment of their personal dreams.

"Heck," says Etheridge while waiting for loudspeaker call for LBJ, "I'd pay them to be able to do this."