

Dallas news July 4 1977



Dallas News staff photo by Larry Provart.

Assassination filming pauses for makeup repairs on Kennedy double.

Spectators flashback

By TOM BELDEN

It was Nov. 22, 1963, but it was July 3, 1977, too.

The double for John F. Kennedy flashed the familiar grin and waved to the throng gathered at Dealey Plaza. The Jacqueline Kennedy look-alike was radiant in her cheery, pink suit and pillbox hat.

The two happy figures riding in the back seat of the long black limousine had stirred the spectators' vivid memories when the sharp report of rifle fire interrupted their polite applause.

The producers of the made-for-television movie, "The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald," filmed the re-creation of Kennedy's assassination over and over in Downtown Dallas Sunday, striving each time to catch all the subtleties of the scene.

With dozens of production personnel milling about, 300 extras working as motorcade spectators and supervising producer Laurence Schiller marching up and down Elm Street barking orders, there was no question this was only a re-enactment.

But each time the rifle fire rang out from the sixth floor of the former Texas School Book Depository building, there were many in the crowd who flinched, drew in their breath and shook their heads.

Many remembered exactly where they were and what they were doing on that sunny November day almost 14 years ago, and for a brief second

they were transported back in time.

"When I saw the way she was dressed, and the President bare-headed, it gave you a strange feeling. It brought tears," said one spectator, Maevis Chapman of Irving.

A friend of Mrs. Chapman, Mrs. Earl Reay of Napier, New Zealand, looked even more disturbed by what she was seeing.

"Choked up," was all she could say.

The ABC television movie is being filmed on location in the area and will be a 4-hour drama centered on the trial that might have taken place if Oswald had not been gunned down himself two days after the Kennedy assassination.

The feature film stars Ben Gazzara, Lorne Greene and John Pleshette as Oswald, but most of the extras and supporting characters were hired locally.

Streets were blocked off around Dealey Plaza Sunday, and will be Monday, to keep automobile traffic out of the area, but pedestrians were free to walk close to the scene. Many would-be spectators were caught by the camera as part of the crowd that watched the re-creation of the presidential motorcade.

A number of spectators were tourists who wanted to see the assassination site and had not known how real the scene would be.

Frances and Edward Gathouse of Brooklyn, N.Y., remembered they were coming out of a candy store

when they heard the President had been shot, and also recall that they felt some resentment toward Dallas because of the tragedy.

"Now that we're here, it's different," Mrs. Gathouse said. "Everybody here is so friendly and easy-going. You can't find any warmer people."

The Gathouses said they were seriously considering moving to Dallas because of the people they have met.

For one member of the movie company, an amateur actor playing the part of then Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson, the ride in the movie motorcade seemed doubly strange.

Bob Etheridge, a salesman of burglar and fire alarms, sold some of his products to the Texas School Book Depository in 1972. He got the job as Johnson's double the day after he saw an advertisement by the movie's producers, in part because he had a whole wardrobe of suits with thin lapels, 1963 style. He ended up selling 10 suits to be used in the movie.

"Five minutes before the assassination happened, I was watching the parade and I could have reached out and touched him (Kennedy)," Etheridge said between takes. "It's a real weird feeling to have seen the parade, and then to have been involved with the building in 1972, and then to see them re-create the assassination. It's something I never dreamed would have happened."