

23 NOV 1964

1124 AES

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A145WX

JOHNSON-ASSASSINATION (1000)

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, NOV. 23 (AP)-THE SENSE OF SICKENING SHOCK. . .THE "SHARP, PAINFUL AND BITTER CONCERN FOR THE HEROIC LADY WIDOWED BY THE ASSASSIN'S BULLETS. . . THE SAD, HURRIED STEPS TO ASSURE CONTINUITY IN THE NATION'S LEADERSHIP.

THESE ARE RECOUNTED BY PRESIDENT JOHNSON IN A STATEMENT GIVEN TO THE WARREN COMMISSION INVESTIGATING THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY.

HE TOLD HOW--AGAINST THE INSISTENT ADVICE OF WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS IN DALLAS AND WASHINGTON--HE REFUSED TO RETURN TO WASHINGTON WITH MRS. JOHN F. KENNEDY AND THE BODY OF HER HUSBAND.

FROM THE EXPERIENCE, JOHNSON GAINED AN INDELIBLE IMPRESSION OF THE "BRAVERY, NOBILITY AND DIGNITY" OF THE FALLEN PRESIDENT'S WIFE.

JOHNSON'S ACCOUNT OF THE DARK DAY IN DALLAS LAST NOV. 22 WAS GIVEN TO THE WARREN COMMISSION IN THE FORM OF A STATEMENT LAST JULY. IT WAS INCORPORATED IN ONE OF THE VOLUMES OF TESTIMONY ON WHICH THE COMMISSION BASED ITS REPORT LAST SEPT. 27. NOW SOME OF THE SUPPORTING VOLUMES OF EVIDENCE HAVE JUST BECOME AVAILABLE TO THE ASSOCIATED PRESS.

JOHNSON ACCOMPANIED THE STATEMENT WITH A PREFATORY, APOLOGETIC NOTE. "I AM CONSCIOUS OF THE LIMITATIONS OF MY NARRATIVE," HE SAID. "I HAD NO OPPORTUNITY IN THE DIFFICULT AND CRITICAL DAYS FOLLOWING THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY TO RECORD MY IMPRESSIONS. RECOLLECTION AT THIS LATE DATE IS NECESSARILY INCOMPLETE."

A146WX

JOHNSON EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THIS IMPRESSIONS, EVEN IF THEY PROVED OF LITTLE USE TO THE COMMISSION, "MAY BE OF SOME INTEREST."

THE ABOUT-TO-BE PRESIDENT HAD LITTLE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING ON WHEN THE SHOTS FROM LEE HARVEY OSWALD'S RIFLE RIPPED INTO KENNEDY AND TEXAS GOV. JOHN B. CONNALLY, TWO CARS AHEAD OF JOHNSON'S CAR. A SECRET SERVICE AGENT WAS SITTING ON TOP OF HIM. AS JOHNSON TELLS IT:

"I WAS STARTLED BY THE SHARP REPORT, OR EXPLOSION, BUT I HAD NO TIME TO SPECULATE AS TO ITS ORIGIN BECAUSE AGENT (RUFUS) YOUNGBLOOD TURM

(MORE)

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A170WX

WASHINGTON--FIRST ADD JOHNSON-ASSASSINATION (A145) XXX TELLS IT:

"I WAS STARTLED BY THE SHARP REPORT, OR EXPLOSION, BUT I HAD NO TIME TO SPECULATE AS TO ITS ORIGIN BECAUSE AGENT (RUFUS) YOUNGBLOOD TURNED IN A FLASH IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FIRST EXPLOSION, HITTING ME ON THE SHOULDER, AND HOUTED TO US ALL IN THE BACK SEAT TO GET DOWN. (MRS. JOHNSON AND TEXAS SEN. RALPH YARBOROUGH WERE RIDING WITH JOHNSON IN THE BACK SEAT).

"I WAS PUSHED OVER BY AGENT YOUNGBLOOD. ALMOST IN THE SAME MOMENT IN WHICH HE HIT, OR PUSHED ME. HE VAULTED OVER THE BACK SEAT AND SAT ON ME. I WAS BENT OVER UNDER THE WEIGHT OF AGENT YOUNGBLOOD'S BODY TOWARD MRS. JOHNSON AND SEN. YARBOROUGH. I REMEMBER ATTEMPTING TO TURN MY HEAD TO MAKE SURE THAT MRS. JOHNSON HAD BENT DOWN. BOTH SHE AND SEN. YARBOROUGH HAD CROUCHED DOWN AT AGENT YOUNGBLOOD'S COMMAND."

YOUNGBLOOD REMAINED IN COMMAND WHEN JOHNSON REACHED THE HOSPITAL WHERE KENNEDY HAD BEEN TAKEN. A CORDON OF SECRET SERVICE AGENTS RUSHED THE VICE PRESIDENT INTO A ROOM AND PULLED DOWN THE SHADES. MRS. JOHNSON WENT OUT TO SEE MRS. KENNEDY AND MRS. CONNALLY, JOHNSON SAID, BUT YOUNGBLOOD "TOLD ME THAT I COULD NOT LEAVE THE ROOM AND I FOLLOWED HIS DIRECTIVE."

IT WAS AT 1:20 P.M., THAT JOHNSON LEARNED FROM KENNETH O'DONNELL, A KENNEDY AIDE, THAT HE HAD SUCCEEDED TO THE PRESIDENCY.

"HE TOLD US THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD DIED," JOHNSON SAID. "I THINK HIS PRECISE WORDS WERE, 'HE'S GONE.'

"I FOUND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THIS HAD HAPPENED. THE WHOLE THING SEEMED UNREAL, UNBELIEVABLE. A FEW HOURS EARLIER I HAD BREAKFAST WITH JOHN KENNEDY; HE WAS ALIVE, STRONG, VIGOROUS. I COULD NOT BELIEVE NOW THAT HE WAS DEAD. I WAS SHOCKED AND SICKENED."

O'DONNELL TRIED TO GET JOHNSON TO LEAVE FOR WASHINGTON IMMEDIATELY, BUT WHEN JOHNSON LEARNED THAT MRS. KENNEDY WOULD NOT LEAVE THE HOSPITAL WITHOUT KENNEDY'S BODY, HE REFUSED TO GO. A SECRET SERVICE AGENT ALSO PRESSED HIM TO MAKE AN IMMEDIATE DEPARTURE.

EA171WX

"I DID NOT WANT TO GO AND LEAVE MRS. KENNEDY IN THIS SITUATION," JOHNSON SAID. "I SAID SO, BUT I AGREED WE WOULD BOARD THE AIRPLANE AND WAIT UNTIL MRS. KENNEDY AND THE PRESIDENT'S BODY WERE BROUGHT ABOARD THE PLANE.

"IT IS DIFFICULT TO CONVEY AN ACCURATE IMPRESSION OF THE PERIOD OF TIME WE WERE IN THE HOSPITAL ROOM. I SUPPOSE WE WERE IN A STATE OF SHOCK AND THERE WAS NO TIME FOR THE SHOCK TO WEAR OFF SUFFICIENTLY

SO THAT THE MAGNITUDE OF OUR PERSONAL LOSS OF THIS GREAT MAN AND GOOD FRIEND COULD EXPRESS ITSELF IN WORDS OR IN SURFACE FEELINGS.

"I SUPPOSE, ACTUALLY, THAT THE ONLY OUTLET FOR THE GRIEF THAT SHOCK HAD SUBMERGED WAS OUR SHARP, PAINFUL AND BITTER CONCERN AND SOLICITUDE FOR MRS. KENNEDY."

DESPITE HIS AWARENESS OF THE REASONS HE SHOULD RETURN IMMEDIATELY TO WASHINGTON, HE SAID, "I WAS DETERMINED THAT WE WOULD NOT RETURN UNTIL MRS. KENNEDY WAS READY, AND THAT WE WOULD CARRY THE PRESIDENT'S BODY BACK WITH US IF SHE WANTED."

AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PLANE, JOHNSON AND HIS WIFE WERE SHOWN INTO THE PRIVATE QUARTERS. "IT DIDN'T SEEM RIGHT FOR JOHN KENNEDY NOT TO BE THERE," SAID JOHNSON, WHO HAD FLOWN TO TEXAS IN ANOTHER PLANE. "I TOLD SOMEONE WE PREFERRED FOR MRS. KENNEDY TO USE THESE QUARTERS."

"SHORTLY AFTER WE BOARDED THE PLANE I CALLED ROBERT KENNEDY, THE PRESIDENT'S BROTHER AND ATTORNEY GENERAL (WHO WAS IN WASHINGTON.) I KNEW HOW GRIEF-STRICKEN HE WAS AND I WANTED TO SAY SOMETHING THAT WOULD COMFORT HIM. DESPITE HIS SHOCK, HE DISCUSSED THE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS AT HAND--PROBLEMS OF SPECIAL URGENCY BECAUSE WE DID NOT AT THAT TIME HAVE ANY INFORMATION AS TO THE MOTIVATION OF THE ASSASSINATION, OR ITS POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS.

"THE ATTORNEY GENERAL SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO LOOK INTO THE MATTER OF WHETHER THE OATH OF OFFICE AS PRESIDENT SHOULD BE ADMINISTERED TO ME IMMEDIATELY OR AFTER WE RETURNED TO WASHINGTON, AND THAT HE WOULD CALL BACK.

"I THEREAFTER TALKED WITH MCGEORGE BUNDY AND WALTER JENKINS, BOTH OF WHOM URGED THAT THE RETURN TO WASHINGTON NOT BE DELAYED. I TOLD THEM I WAS WAITING FOR MRS. KENNEDY AND FOR THE PRESIDENT'S BODY TO BE PLACED ON THE PLANE AND WOULD NOT RETURN PRIOR TO THAT TIME.

EA172WX

"AS I REMEMBER, OUR CONVERSATION WAS INTERRUPTED TO ALLOW THE ATTORNEY GENERAL TO COME BACK ON THE LINE. HE SAID THAT THE OATH SHOULD BE ADMINISTERED TO ME IMMEDIATELY, BEFORE TAKING OFF FOR WASHINGTON, AND THAT IT SHOULD BE ADMINISTERED BY A JUDICIAL OFFICER OF THE UNITED STATES. SHORTLY THEREAFTER, THE DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL, MR. KATZENBACH, DICTATED THE FORM OF THE OATH TO ONE OF THE SECRETARIES ABOARD THE PLANE.

"I THOUGHT OF SARAH HUGHES, AN OLD FRIEND, WHO IS JUDGE OF THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT IN DALLAS. WE TELEPHONED JUDGE HUGHES' OFFICE. SHE WAS NOT THERE BUT SHE RETURNED THE CALL IN A FEW MINUTES AND SAID SHE WOULD BE AT THE AIRPLANE IN 10 MINUTES.

"A FEW MINUTES LATER MRS. KENNEDY AND THE PRESIDENT'S COFFIN ARRIVED. MRS. JOHNSON AND I SPOKE TO HER. WE TRIED TO COMFORT HER, BUT OUR WORDS SEEMED INADEQUATE. SHE WENT INTO THE PRIVATE QUARTERS OF THE PLANE. I ESTIMATE THAT MRS. KENNEDY AND THE COFFIN ARRIVED ABOUT A HALF-HOUR AFTER WE ENTERED THE PLANE, JUST AFTER 2 O'CLOCK.

"ABOUT A HALF-HOUR LATER I ASKED SOMEONE TO FIND OUT IF MRS. KENNEDY WOULD STAND WITH US DURING THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE OATH. MRS. JOHNSON WENT BACK TO BE WITH HER. MRS. KENNEDY CAME AND STOOD WITH US DURING THE MOMENTS THAT THE OATH WAS BEING ADMINISTERED.

"I SHALL NEVER FORGET HER BRAVERY, NOBILITY AND DIGNITY."

EA173WX

THE PLANE CARRYING THE NEW PRESIDENT AND THE BODY OF THE OLD ONE THEN TOOK OFF AND JOHNSON CALLED KENNEDY'S MOTHER, MRS. ROSE KENNEDY.

"SHE HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN ADVISED OF THE ASSASSINATION," HE SAID. "I TOLD HER OF OUR GRIEF AND OF OUR SORROW FOR HER. I GAVE THE TELEPHONE TO MRS. JOHNSON, WHO ALSO TRIED TO BRING A WORD OF COMFORT TO THE PRESIDENT'S MOTHER.

"I THEN CALLED NELLIE CONNALLY, THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE, AND TOLD HER OF OUR CONCERN FOR HER AND JOHN, AND TRIED TO GIVE HER SOME COMFORT.

"I THEN ASKED GEN. CLIFTON, THE MILITARY AIDE TO THE PRESIDENT, TO CALL MCGEORGE BUNDY IN WASHINGTON AND INSTRUCT HIM TO ASK THE CABINET MEMBERS WHO WERE ON THEIR WAY TO JAPAN TO RETURN IMMEDIATELY.

"WHEN WE LANDED AT ANDREWS AIR FORCE BASE I MADE A SHORT STATEMENT TO THE PRESS, RADIO AND TELEVISION. IN MY HEART, I ASKED FOR GOD'S HELP THAT I SHOULD NOT PROVE UNWORTHY OF THE RESPONSIBILITY WHICH FATE HAD THRUST UPON ME."

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