

Taped Statement by Mrs. Johnson

Following is the text of a taped statement and of a letter of transmittal by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson submitted July 16 to the Warren Commission:

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

The White House,
Washington, July 16, 1964
The Honorable Earl Warren
The Chief Justice of the
United States,
Washington, D.C.

My Dear Mr. Chief Justice:
Mr. Lee Rankin, chief
counsel to the President's
Commission on the Assassination
of President Kennedy,
has advised me that the commission
would be interested
to have a statement from me
concerning my recollection
of the events of Nov. 22, 1963.

Beginning on Nov. 30, and
as I found time on the following
two days, I dictated
my recollection of that fateful
and dreadful day on a
small tape recorder which I
had at The Elms, where we
were then living. I did this
primarily as a form of therapy
— to help me over the
shock and horror of the
experience of President Kennedy's
assassination. I did not
intend that the tape should
be used.

The quality of the tape
recording is very poor, but upon
considering your commission's
request, I decided to ask that
the tape relating to Nov. 22
be transcribed. I am sending
the transcription to you with
only a few, minor corrections.
Perhaps it will serve your
purposes. I hope so. In any
event, it is a more faithful
record of my recollection and
impressions than I could
produce at this late date.

Please accept, for your and
members of the commission
and its staff, my thanks and
best wishes for the important
task which you have undertaken
and to which all of you
have so generously dedicated
yourselves.

LADY BIRD JOHNSON,
MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON

STATEMENT

It all began so beautifully.
After a drizzle in the morning,
the sun came out bright
and beautiful. We were going
into Dallas. In the lead car,
President and Mrs. Kennedy,
John and Nellie, and then a
Secret Service car full of men,
and then our car—Lyndon and
me and Senator Yarborough.

The streets were lined with
people—lots and lots of people
—the children all smiling;
placards, confetti; people waving
from windows. One last
happy moment I had was looking
up and seeing Mary Griffith
leaning out of a window
waving at me. Mary for many
years had been in charge of
altering the clothes which I
purchased at a Dallas store.

Then almost at the edge of
town, on our way to the Trade
Mart where we were going to
have the luncheon, we were
rounding a curve, going down
a hill, and suddenly there was
a sharp loud report—a shot. It
seemed to me to come from
the right, above my shoulder,
from a building. Then a moment
and then two more shots
in rapid succession.

There had been such a gala
air that I thought it must be
firecrackers or some sort of
celebration. Then, in the lead
car, the Secret Service men
were suddenly down. I HEARD
OVER THE RADIO SYSTEM,
get out of here!" And our Secret
Service man who was with
us, Ruf Youngblood, I believe
it was, vaulted over the front
seat on top of Lyndon, threw
him to the floor, and said, "Get
down!"

The Car Accelerates

Senator Yarborough and I
ducked our heads. The car
accelerated terrifically fast—faster
and faster. Then suddenly
put on the brakes so hard that
I wondered if they were going
to make it as we wheeled left
and went around the corner. We
pulled up to a building. I looked
up and saw it said "hospital."
Only then did I believe that
this might be what it was.

Yarborough kept on saying
in an excited voice, "Habe they
shot the President?" I said
something like, "No; it can't
be."

As we ground to a halt—we
were still the third car—Secret
Service men began to pull, lead,
guide, and hustle us out. I cast
one last look over my shoulder
and saw, in the President's car,
a bundle of pink, just like a
drift of blossoms, lying on the
back seat. I think it was Mrs.
Kennedy lying over the President's
body. They led us to the
right, the left, and onward into
a quiet room in the hospital—
a very small room. It was lined
with white sheets, I believe.

People came and went—Kenny
O'Donnell, Congressman
Thornberry, Congressman Jack
Brooks. Always there was Ruf
right there; Emory Roberts,
Jerry Kivett, Lem Johns and
Woody Taylor. There was talk
about where we would go—
back to Washington, to the
plane, to our house. People
spoke of how widespread this
may be. Through it all, Lyndon
was remarkably calm and quiet.
Every face that came in you
searched for the answers you
must know. I think the face I
kept seeing it on was the face
of Kenny O'Donnell, who loved
him so much.

Advice From Johnson

It was Lyndon as usual who
thought of it first, although I
wasn't going to leave without
doing it. He said: "You had better
try to see if you can see
Jackie and Nellie." We didn't
know what had happened to
John.

I asked the Secret Service
men if I could be taken to them.
They began to lead me up one
corridor, back stairs, and down
another. Suddenly I found myself
face to face with Jackie in
a small hall. I think it was
right outside the operating
room.

You always think of her—or
someone like her—as being insulated,
protected; she was
quite alone. I don't think I ever
saw anyone so much alone in
my life. I went up to her, put
my arms around her, and said

something to her. I'm sure it
was something like, "God, help
us all," because my feelings for
her were too tumultuous to put
into words.

And then I went in to see
Nellie. There it was different
because Nellie and I have gone
through so many things together
since 1938. I hugged her
tight and we both cried and I
said, "Nellie, it's going to be
all right." And Nellie said,
"Yes; John's going to be all
right." Among her many other
fine qualities, she is also tough.

Then I turned and went back
to the small white room where
Lyndon was. Mr. Kilduff and
Kenny O'Donnell were coming
and going. I think it was from
Kenny's face and Kenny's voice
that I first heard the words,
"The President is dead." Mr.
Kilduff entered and said to Lyndon,
"Mr. President."

It was decided that we would
go immediately to the airport.
Quick plans were made about
how to get to the car, who to
ride in what. It was Lyndon
who said we should go to the
plane in unmarked cars. Getting
out of the hospital into the
cars was one of the swiftest
walks I have ever made. We got
in. Lyndon said to stop the
sirens. We drove along as fast
as we could. I looked up at a
building and there already was
a flag at half-mast. I think
that is when the enormity of
what had happened first struck
me.

When we got to the airplane,
we entered airplane No. 1 for
the first time. There was a TV
set on, and the commentator
was saying, "Lyndon B. Johnson,
now President of the United
States." They were saying
they had a suspect. They were
not sure he was the assassin.
The President had been shot
with a 30-30 rifle. On the plane,
all the shades were lowered.

Lyndon said that we were
going to wait for Mrs. Kennedy
and the coffin. There was
discussion about when Lyndon
should be sworn in as President.
There was a telephone call to
Washington—I believe to the
Attorney General. It was
decided that he should be sworn
in Dallas quickly as possible
because of international implications,
and because we did not
know how widespread this
incident was as to intended victims.
Judge Sarah Hughes, a
Federal judge in Dallas — and
I am glad it was she — was
called to come in a hurry.

Mrs. Kennedy Arrives

Mrs. Kennedy had arrived by
this time and the coffin, and
there—in the very narrow
confines of the plane with Jackie
on his left with her hair falling
in her face, but very composed,
and then Lyndon, and I was on
his right, Judge Hughes with
the Bible in front of her and
a cluster of Secret Service
people and Congressmen we
had known for a long time—
Lyndon took the oath of office.

It's odd at a time like that
the little things that come to
your mind and a moment of
deep compassion you have for
people who are really not at
the center of the tragedy. I
heard a Secret Service man say
in the most desolate voice, and
I hurt for him, "We never lost

a President in the service." And
then Police Chief Curry, of
Dallas, came on the plane and
said to Mrs. Kennedy, "Mrs.
Kennedy, believe me, we did
everything we possibly could."

We all sat around the plane.
We had at first been ushered
into the main private Presidential
cabin on the plane —
but Lyndon quickly said, "No,
no" and immediately led us out
of there; we felt that is where
Mrs. Kennedy should be. The
casket was in the hall. I went
in to see Mrs. Kennedy and,
though it was a very hard thing
to do, she made it as easy as
possible.

She said things like, "Oh,
Lady Bird, it's good that we've
always liked you two so much."
She said, "Oh, what if I had
not been there? I'm so glad
I was there."

I looked at her. Mrs. Kennedy's
dress was stained with
blood. Her right glove was
caked—that immaculate woman—
it was caked with blood,
her husband's blood. She always
wore gloves like she was
used to them. I never could.
Somehow that was one of the
most poignant sights —
exquisitely dressed and caked
in blood. I asked her if I couldn't
get someone to help her
change, and she said, "Oh, no.
Perhaps later I'll ask Mary
Gallagher, but not right now."

She said a lot of other things,
like, "What if I had not been
there? Oh, I'm so glad I was
there," and a lot of other
things that made it so much
easier for us. "Oh, Lady Bird,
we've always liked you both so
much."

Comfort for Mrs. Kennedy

I tried to express something
of how we felt. I said, "Oh,
Mrs. Kennedy, you know we
never even wanted to be Vice
President and now, Dear God,
it's come to this." I would
have done anything to help her,
but there was nothing I could
do to help her, so rather quickly
I left and went back to the
main part of the airplane
where everyone was seated.

The ride to Washington was
silent, strained—each with his
own thoughts. One of mine was
something I had said about Lyndon
a long time ago—that he's
a good man in a tight spot. I
even remember one little thing
he said in that hospital room,
"Tell the children to get a Secret
Service man with them."

Finally, we got to Washington,
with a cluster of people
watching. Many bright lights.
The casket went off first; then
Mrs. Kennedy. The family had
come to join them, and then
we followed. Lyndon made a
very simple, very brief and —
I think — strong, talk to the
folks there. Only about four
sentences, I think. We got in
cars; we dropped him off at
the White House, and I came
home.