

KENNEDY SLAYING RELIVED IN DETAIL IN WARREN FILES

TESTIMONY OF 552

Widow's Recollections Among the Poignant Passages Published

Excerpts from the testimony,
Pp. 28 through 32.

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 23 — The assassination of John F. Kennedy is relived in excruciating detail in the testimony given to the Warren Commission by those closest to the horror.

"My husband never made any sound," Mrs. Kennedy told the commission. "He had this sort of quizzical look on his face . . . and then he . . . put his hand to his forehead and fell in my lap."

Mrs. Kennedy's poignant recollections of Nov. 22, 1963, were published today along with the testimony of the 551 other witnesses before the commission. Their words and supporting exhibits filled 26 volumes.

The testimony overwhelmingly supported the conclusion of Chief Justice Earl Warren and his colleagues, as revealed in the commission's report Sept. 27, that the assassination was no conspiracy but the work of one unhappy man, Lee Harvey Oswald.

Detail Is Provided

The detail was fascinating even as it chilled the reader. The 26 volumes contain essential human material for the historian, for those abroad and at home who remain skeptical about the circumstances of the assassination, and for all who loved President Kennedy.

There is Kenneth P. O'Donnell, the President's close friend and assistant, who was riding in the car behind him through Dallas, saw the fatal bullet hit, and knew it for what it was.

He told the commission: "It was such a perfect shot—I remember I blessed myself."

In the next car were Vice President and Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson and Senator Ralph W. Yarborough of Texas. Mr. Johnson could not tell what was happening because a Secret Service agent in his car, Rufus W. Youngblood, jumped on top of him a moment after the shots to protect him.

Agent's Grief Shown

"I was startled by the sharp report or explosion," Mr. Johnson said in a written statement to the commission, "but I had no time to speculate as to its origin because agent Youngblood turned in a flash, immediately after the first explosion, hitting me on the shoulder, and shouted to all of us in the back seat to get down."

"Almost in the same moment in which he hit or pushed me, he vaulted over the back seat and sat on me."

Senator Yarborough got the intimation of tragedy within a few seconds, as he saw another Secret Service agent, Clinton J. Hill, on the trunk of the Presidential car.

"He beat the back of the car with one hand," Senator Yarborough said, "his face contorted by grief, anguish and despair, and I knew from that instant that some terrible loss had been suffered."

Mrs. Kennedy was troubled for a time by the thought that she might have saved her husband's life if she had been looking at him when the first bullet hit him in his back. The later, fatal shot struck his head.

"I used to think," she said, "if only I had been looking to the right I would have seen the first shot hit him, then I could have pulled him down, and then the second shot would not have hit him."

In a sense, the publication of these supporting volumes of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy brought to an end the immediate period of examination of the tragedy in Dallas. It was an accident that publication came just a year and a day after the assassination.

The volumes were scheduled to be given to the press this Wednesday for publication next Monday afternoon. They were suddenly issued for immediate release this afternoon after The Associated Press carried substantial excerpts.

The wire service acted because of what it considered a competitive publication of an excerpt in this morning's Drew Pearson column, written by Mr. Pearson's assistant, Jack Anderson. That excerpt was from Mrs. Johnson's statement.

Articles Prepared

According to the A.P.'s account of events, the news service had been given some volumes for use only if anyone else broke the release. The Anderson column convinced A.P. editors that they should go ahead with several articles written in advance for that contingency.

The commission said that it was printing the entire testi-

mony except for "brief" and "irrelevant" deletions on grounds of taste. In Mrs. Kennedy's testimony, for example, there appeared the bracketed statement: "Reference to wounds deleted."

Many horrifying passages on the President's injuries did appear.

Mrs. Johnson's statement to the commission was one of the most interesting. It was a transcript of a tape recording she made beginning Nov. 30, much closer to the event than most of the witnesses' testimony.

On the plane going back to Washington with President Kennedy's body, she talked to Jacqueline Kennedy and remembered her saying:

"What if I had not been there? Oh, I'm so glad I was there."

And Mrs. Johnson said she remarked:

"Oh, Mrs. Kennedy, you know we never even wanted to be Vice President and now, dear God, it's come to this."

At Parkland Memorial Hospital, while doctors were still working over the wounded President, Mrs. Johnson felt but was never definitely told the inevitable outcome, she said.

"Every face that came in," she said, "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."

The Truth 'Penetrated'

Lawrence F. O'Brien, another special assistant to the President, also testified about how the terrible truth slowly became evident in the hospital corridor without announcement. He said, "It penetrated, without a specific statement by anyone."

Similarly, when Mr. O'Donnell asked a doctor whether there was any hope at all, he said he "was unable to get any conclusive answer, but I think I got the answer I needed." On arriving at the hospital he had called for a priest.

Mr. O'Donnell broke the news to Mr. Johnson, at that moment the President.

"I think his precise words were, 'He's gone,'" Mr. Johnson told the commission, "O'Donnell said that we should return to Washington and that we should take the President's plane for this purpose."

"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."

President Johnson's statement was sent to the commission last July 10. Neither he nor Mrs. Johnson testified under oath. Other witnesses were sworn for testimony or depositions.

Macabre Incidents Related

Many macabre incidents were related in the testimony.

Mrs. Johnson, for example, said she had heard a Secret Service man say, "in the most desolate voice," that "we never lost a President in the service." And she said Police Chief Jesse E. Curry of Dallas boarded the plane just before its departure for Washington and told Mrs. Kennedy:

"Believe me, we did everything we possibly could."

Perhaps the grimmest piece of incongruity was the effort of some Dallas officials, still unidentified, to prevent the removal of President Kennedy's body from the hospital until an autopsy had been carried out and certain papers signed.

Mrs. Kennedy steadfastly refused to leave without the body, and President Johnson would not go without her. Thus the attitude of the Dallas officials was delaying the new President in a situation of suspected danger.

It was Mr. O'Donnell who bore the burden of this episode, and he was still agitated as he told the commission about it. After failing for some time to get anywhere with the officials, he and others went ahead and began to move the coffin out through the hall.

"This first gentleman that had come in, who I presume was from the coroner's office, shouted very loudly, 'You can't do that—you can't leave here now,' Mr. O'Donnell said. "Nobody paid any attention to him."

But even at the plane Mr. O'Donnell was deeply worried. While the takeoff was delayed for Mr. Johnson to be sworn in, he posted guards at the gates to keep any Dallas medical officials out and had the plane's ramp raised until Federal Judge Sarah Hughes arrived to swear in the President.

On the trip back, Mr. O'Donnell stayed with Mrs. Kennedy, who was still in her blood-stained clothes. A Warren Commission lawyer asked what they talked about.

"We reminisced," Mr. O'Donnell said.

His testimony about Mrs. Kennedy's reaction to the Texas trip before the turn of the motorcade in front of the Texas School Book Depository may be the most touching episode in thousands of sad words.

"She had not been a girl who loved campaigning," Mr. O'Donnell said, but that morning she had told her husband that she would go with him on a planned trip to the West Coast.

"She said she would be delighted to come, and she would like to go from now on," Mr. O'Donnell said. "The President was delighted. We were all delighted."

As must occur in the turbulence of such an event, memories differ.

OVER

Mrs. Kennedy and Gov. John B. Connally of Texas, who was in the same car, are certain that President Kennedy said nothing after the bullets were fired. But Roy H. Kellerman of the Secret Service, who was in the front seat, firmly believes—and he remembers the Boston accent—that the President said, "My God, I am hit."
