

"THE ASSASSINATION:—THE VERDICT IS IN" The Last Hours of a President: A Flashback

Marianne Means was in Dallas, Tex., Nov. 22, 1963, covering President Kennedy. Here is her own story of that day's events, which are probed in the Warren report to be issued today.

By **MARIANNE MEANS**

White House Correspondent, Hearst Headline Service and The N. Y. Journal-American

DALLAS, Sept. 26.—There is no marker near the corner of Elm, Commerce and Main sts. to designate the spot.

But every day a steady stream of visitors comes anyway, to gaze vacantly or sadly at the bustling thoroughfare and the crumbling brown brick of the Texas Book Depository and to pay their silent respects to the memory of President John F. Kennedy.

They leave floral tributes on the sidewalk nearby in Dealey Plaza — a lavender funeral wreath, a spray of carnations, a potted aster. As the Warren Commission prepared to issue its official report on the assassination more than 1,500 miles away in Washington, three dozen bouquets and wreaths decorated the site where the late President was shot down.

"We will never forget you," said a handwritten note fastened to a small spray of roses with a metal hair clip.

The city does not plan to erect a marker on Elm st. to guide future visitors. But that does not matter because the people have made a shrine of the spot all by themselves.

Many Warned Him Not to Go

Many officials, including United Nations Ambassador Adlai Stevenson — who had been spat upon and hit in the head by fanatic right-wingers in Dallas—were uneasy about President Kennedy's visit here last Nov. 22. One congressman dreamed that the President would be killed here, and told the President so. Several White House aides advised against stopping here because they feared some incident from the rightists which would embarrass the President.

But President Kennedy was not a timid man and he wanted to carry the conservative Dallas area in 1964; he had lost it to Richard Nixon in 1960, although he narrowly carried the state.

The Vice President, Lyndon Johnson, had long since wrung a promise from the First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy, that at the first opportunity she would visit Texas, where she had never before been. So it was arranged that she would accompany the President. It was her first official journey with her husband out into the country since the inauguration.

The Presidential party arose early in Fort Worth on Nov. 22. President Kennedy strode out of his hotel at 8:45 a.m. to deliver a brief pep talk to a crowd gathered in a steady drizzle in a parking lot across the street. Then he returned to the hotel to address a Chamber of Commerce breakfast.

Has he dressed that morning, he chatted with the Vice President in his suite. The President was in a good mood. "We'll carry two states in this election at least — Massachusetts and Texas," he remarked.

A Sunny Day In Dallas

The Vice President introduced his sister, Mrs. Birge Alexander, to the President. She recalled later that the President told her "You have a wonderful brother," and that she had burred, "I know it."

Before the Chamber of Commerce, in the last speech he would make, President Kennedy warned "this is a very dangerous and uncertain world."

"Air Force one," the official Presidential jet, touched down in Dallas at 11:40 a.m. after a brief flight from Fort Worth.

"I'll be back," the President told his red-haired stewardess as he left.

The President and Mrs. Kennedy were greeted by a large, enthusiastic, sign-waving throng at the airport. The temperature was 76 degrees and the day was sunny and bright, Mrs. Kennedy, who was wearing a raspberry-colored nubby wool suit trimmed in Navy blue and matching pillbox hat, was presented with a bouquet of blood-red roses by the official welcoming party.

After shaking hands with fans in the crowd, the President and Mrs. Kennedy and Texas Gov. and Mrs. John Connally climbed into the gleaming Navy blue Lincoln Continental which had been flown from Washington. This was the special Presidential limousine, District of Columbia License No. GG 300, which was equipped with bullet-proof windows and a specially-designed "bubble top." Since the day was so warm, however, the "bubble top" was removed and the Presidential party rode in the open.

Crowds Thick And Jubilant

The President sat on the right in the rear seat, with Mrs. Kennedy beside him. The Connallys settled in the jump seats. Their motorcade wound slowly, at approximately eight miles an hour, along an 11-mile route through the heart of downtown Dallas.

The crowds were thick and unexpectedly jubilant. Several cars back in the motorcade, a reporters in the press bus remarked that perhaps it wouldn't be necessary to get a "spit count" in the city after all.

The President's limousine turned sharply to the right on Elm st., just beyond the City Jail and rolled slowly down an incline toward the triple underpass at which Elm, Commerce and Main intersected.

Mrs. Connally turned to the President and smiled. "You can't say the people of Dallas are against you today," she said.

The limousine passed a large green sign that said "Turnpike. Keep Right" in bold white letters. It was only a mile or so further to the Trade Mart, where the President was to address a luncheon. In his prepared text, he lambasted extremism and denounced voices which are "preaching doctrines wholly unrelated to reality, wholly unsuited to the Sixties, doctrines which apparently assume that words will suffice without weapons, that vituperation is as good as victory and that peace is a sign of weakness."

In that speech he never got to give the President warned that "we cannot expect that everyone, to use the phrase of a decade ago, will 'talk sense to the American people. But we can hope that fewer people will listen to nonsense. And the notion that this nation is headed for defeat through deficit, or that strength is but a matter of slogans, is nothing but just plain nonsense."

It was a bold speech, one that would have received an uncertain welcome here, where right wing extremism flourishes.

Two Shots, Then a Third

At 12:30 p.m. local time, two quick shots rang out above the cheers of the crowd, and after a brief pause a third shot. The President slumped forward, the right side of his head literally blown away, blood streaming down his suit.

A 14-year-old Boy Scout, Alan Smith, was standing only ten feet away on the grassy slopes of Dealey Plaza and looking directly at President Kennedy. He said:

"Mr. Kennedy had a big wide smile. But when he was hit, his face turned blank. There was no smile, no frown, nothing. He fell down over Jackie's knees and didn't say anything. She stood up screaming 'God, Oh God, No'. There was blood all over her and everything."

At the sound of the first shot, Gov. Connally swiveled in his chair to look at the President. He was struck by the second bullet, which ploughed through his chest and wrist and embedded in his leg. Mrs. Connally reached out and pulled him into her lap.

Connally was seriously wounded but conscious and later he recalled thinking instantly "He's dead."

For a split second the procession halted in confusion; then the big blue limousine shot forward at top speed. A



FLORAL SPRAYS lie opposite the busy street where assassination occurred. Slayer fired from upper window in building at right.

AP Photo

Secret Service man in the front seat ordered the driver to head for the nearest hospital. Mrs. Kennedy scrambled across the canvas rear deck of the car. A Secret Service agent rushed up and thrust her back into the limousine seat.

'He Never Knew What Hit Him'

In the press bus, a half block away, reporters could not see the President's car clearly. They heard the shots but for some reason even though the President's car sped away and rapidly left the rest of the motorcade behind, not one reporter thought the President might actually have been hit. Such things just didn't happen. The press bus proceeded to the Trade Mart, where the luncheon guests were waiting impatiently. As she got off the bus, one reporter murmured, "I hope he wasn't hurt," nobody answered her, of course he couldn't possibly have been hit, let alone killed.

At the Trade Mart, reporters learned the President had indeed been wounded and had been taken to nearby

Parkland Hospital. Outside the hospital, beneath a red sign which said "Emergency Entrance," stood the empty limousine, its right-hand door flung open and a small pail of water by one wheel. On the floor of the car lay three tattered roses in a pool of blood and beside them a smashed bouquet of asters.

A secret service man beat his fist on the trunk of the car in mute despair.

"He's dead," he curtly told a reporter.

President Kennedy and Gov. Connally had been carried into the hospital on stretchers, their wives walking by their sides. President Kennedy was taken to the emergency table in Operating Room 1. A team of physicians attempted resuscitative measures — oxygen, anesthesia, an endotracheal tube, a tracheotomy, blood and fluids. But by the time he had arrived at the hospital, the President was "moribund," the doctors said. Although they were able to raise "palpable pulses" for a time. Dr. Tom Shries, chief surgeon at the hospital, said:

"Medically, it was apparent the President was not alive when he was brought in. I am absolutely sure he never knew what hit him."