PRESIDENT ASSASSINATED

Chief Executive, Texas Governor Cut Down
By Bullets While Touring Downtown Dallas

NOVEMBER 22, 1963
DALLAS, TEXAS
50TH ANNIVERSARY
THE FACTS OF THE ASSASSINATION
A NARRATION

On Friday, November 22, 1963, at 1:40 p.m. EST, Walter Cronkite, CBS News anchor reporter in New York City, provided the world with the first indication that America was about to change. The CBS program airing at the time was “As the World Turns,” which was interrupted when this message flashed across the television screen: “CBS News Bulletin.” Cronkite couldn’t appear on camera as yet but read from a United Press International (UPI) newswire he had just pulled off the newsroom’s teletype: “In Dallas, Texas, three shots were fired at President Kennedy’s motorcade in downtown Dallas. The first reports say that President Kennedy was seriously wounded by this shooting.” (Because the televising equipment in the newsroom was not prepared, Cronkite did not appear on television screens during his first three news bulletins. When he read the first news bulletin above, the time in Dallas was 12:40 p.m. CST and on the West Coast 10:40 a.m. PST.)

For the next four days, Americans were in a state of shock, disbelief, and heightened distress, living through one of the worst tragedies of the 20th century, the assassination of their President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. As the news unfolded, they watched, listened, and read round-the-clock about the slaying and related events. Many remained transfixed before their black-and-white television screens for hours, wanting answers, thinking at times it was a bad dream. Americans and their nation would never be the same though. It was a turning point as the country began to wander precariously through a chain of debilitating events for the next two decades. The most powerful nation just had the unthinkable happen to it, causing questions of security and ability that once seemed so reliable.

The purpose of this article is to present the facts of the assassination as determined by the 1964 President’s Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy (Warren Commission) and the 1978 House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA). The detailed investigation of the Warren Commission was without precedent and its work deemed authoritative and thorough. The FBI and the Dallas Police Department had filed their reports with the Warren Commission, while the commission did its own extensive field investigations. The commission’s membership was appointed by President Johnson, who were men of the highest caliber, highly-regarded, and loyal Americans. In 1978, the HSCA studied the Warren Commission findings, did its own investigation, looked at 15 years of evidence accumulated after the assassination, and drew the same conclusions as the commission. It included a comment in its report about a possible conspiracy, a conciliatory addition for conspiracy theorists. Therefore, the Warren Commission’s report was fully affirmed and validated by HSCA. What follows are the official facts of the assassination, presented as an introduction to the articles that follow, equipping the reader with basic knowledge of the assassination.

Texas Plans
The 1964 presidential campaign was around the corner, so the thinking among Kennedy strategists was to tour the Southwest and the South, beginning first in Texas. These were tough regions for liberals to attract voters. Texas Democrats were divided, with Democratic Governor John Connally and Vice President Lyndon Johnson being unpopular in parts of their home state. These powerful Texans weren’t conservative enough for right wingers and extremists, especially in Dallas-Forth Worth. President Kennedy once called the Dallas area “nut country.” In those cities, fringe demonstrators were rancorous in protesting visits from opposing politicians. Connally and Johnson both were accorded in Dallas with verbal threats and other unwelcoming antics. Just a month before the assassination, October 1963, United Nations Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, a liberal Democrat, was spat upon in Dallas and hit with a placard by agitated protestors. President Kennedy was particularly disliked in the South, because he was a liberal New Englander and he strongly supported civil rights. Dallas was a hotbed of political rancor and violence, but Kennedy needed to heal the Texas Democratic Party split and win its support in 1964.

Plans began for Kennedy’s Texas trip after the President spoke at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs on June 5, 1963. He stopped in El Paso, Texas to confer with Connally and Johnson. They decided that a presidential party would make a four-city tour (Houston, San Antonio, Fort Worth, and Dallas) in late November. No motorcades were planned initially for the tour. It would begin the afternoon of November 21st in Houston, ending on the evening of November 22nd in Dallas. The next day, Johnson would play host at his LBJ Ranch.

On October 4, 1963, Connally visited the White House to discuss the Texas trip further. He and the President met with Kennedy’s special assistant Kenneth O’Donnell, who had the responsibility of coordinating the trip, with specific details being left to Connally. O’Donnell, however, wanted a motorcade through Dallas to give the President public exposure. It was now up to the Secret Service to plan the Kennedy motorcade route through Dallas.

Houston and Fort Worth
On November 21, 1963, the President spoke at Rice University in Houston and next at a dinner for Texas Democratic Congressman Albert Thomas, a key player in the Kennedy strategy. The President and his wife Jackie flew from Houston to Fort Worth and stayed at the Texas Hotel that night. This was the first time since the 1960 presidential campaign that the First Lady had traveled with the President on a political tour. The President commented jokingly to his staff member David Powers that the warm turnout was for Jackie.

Dallas Motorcade
The Dallas motorcade route for November 22nd was planned by Secret Service agents Forrest V. Sorrels and Winston G. Lawson. After swinging through downtown Dallas, the President was scheduled to speak at a Trade Mart luncheon. The Secret Service was more concerned with Trade Mart security than with the motorcade. Kennedy was fully aware of the risks and dangers of public appearances. As a historian, he was mindful of American assassinations and attempted assassinations. At the Texas Hotel that night, Kennedy, Jackie, and O’Donnell talked some about the
risks. O’Donnell recalled that the President remarked: “If anybody really wanted to shoot the President of the United States, it was not a very difficult job – all one had to do was get in a high building someday with a telescopic rifle, and there was nothing anybody could do to defend against such an attempt.”

The planned route of the Dallas motorcade was to depart from Love Airport in Dallas and proceed in a southwest direction through suburban Dallas and then travel on Main Street through the downtown area. Next it would then enter Stemmons Freeway, which would take the motorcade to the Trade Mart, where there would be lunch and the President would speak to a gathering. The full motorcade excursion was approximately ten miles. There was a problem though. Main Street didn’t have an onramp for the freeway. In order to enter the freeway, the motorcade needed to exit Main Street, taking Houston Street for one block, turn left onto Elm Street, which passed in front of the Texas School Book Depository and Dealey Plaza. After passing the plaza, the road then dipped under the railroad overpass and then to the freeway.

November 22nd was a warm, sunny fall day in Dallas. At the front of the motorcade were motorcycle policemen, followed by the Dallas Police pilot car to warn stationed policemen along the route that the motorcade was approaching. Next came more motorcycle policemen, then a car carrying Secret Service agents and Dallas Police officials. This group was responsible to scan the crowds and buildings carefully along the way. Then came the presidential limousine 150 feet behind. In the front seat sat Secret Service driver, William Greer, and Secret Service agent, Roy Kellerman. President Kennedy and Jackie were in the backseat with the President on her right. In the middle was a jump seat where Governor Connally and his wife Nellie sat, with the Governor to her right.

O’Donnell had the clear plastic bubble removed from the presidential limousine, because the weather was pleasant, but even if it were on, the Plexiglas was not bullet proof. There were motorcycle policemen on both sides of the limousine, primarily to keep the crowds back. The car following the presidential limousine carried eight Secret Service agents, with four inside and four standing on the running boards. Inside the car also sat O’Donnell and Powers. The agents surveyed the crews, buildings, crossings, and overpasses looking for signs of trouble. Following the Secret Service agents’ vehicle was the limousine carrying Johnson, Connally, and their wives. Further back were cars carrying dignitaries and politicians, as well as the White House communications car, three cars with press photographers, and several buses carrying members of the press and White House staff members.

The motorcade left Love Airport at 11:50 a.m. CST, traveling at speeds between 25 to 30 mph. At first, the crowds were small, with the President asking the limousine driver to stop twice to shake hands and to speak to a nun leading a group of children. Once downtown the crowds became much larger, with thousands of people gathered along the way. This required the presidential limousine to slow to 11 mph. The significant and friendly turnout was proving the motorcade to be a huge success for the President. So thrilled was Nellie Connally that she turned to the President, just as the car turned on Houston Street, saying, “Mr. President, you can’t say Dallas doesn’t love you.” He replied, “That is very obvious.” It was 12:30 p.m. CST when the limousine turned onto Elm Street in front of the Texas School Book Depository. Lee Harvey Oswald was waiting furtively at the southeast window of the sixth floor of the book depository for the motorcade, with his high-powered rifle and telescope resting on book boxes to steady his aim.

Oswald

He held an Italian surplus Mannlicher-Carcano 6.5 mm, bolt-action, military rifle, bearing the serial number C-2766. The FBI later secured the number and searched for ownership, finding the data quickly. Oswald had purchased the rifle for $19.95 from Klein’s Sporting Goods Co. in Chicago by mail order dated March 12, 1963. He purchased the weapon under the name of “A. Hidell,” with the “A” representing his Russian nick name “Alek” and “Hidell” for Castro, the Cuban dictator, his Marxist hero. The “H” in “Hidell” was for the first letter in Oswald’s middle name “Harvey.” After Oswald received the rifle and telescope by mail, he had Dallas gunsmith Dial D. Ryder mount the scope on his weapon and bore sight it for accuracy, costing $6. Irving’s residents had seen Oswald in a rural park practicing with his rifle, with Oswald’s Russian-born wife Marina knowing of his target practicing. He also used his rifle in the evening of April 10, 1963 in an attempted assassination of retired Major General Edwin A. Walker, who was in his Dallas house sitting at his desk. Oswald fired one bullet at the right wing agitator, missing him, but Oswald panicked, running from the site, not even knowing if he had struck his target. Marina waited for the police to come to their residence, but they didn’t.
On November 22nd, Oswald took his rifle to work at the book depository wrapped in plain brown paper he had borrowed from work. He arranged the paper so that it was fashioned into a bag to allow him to carry the rifle but shaped to disguise its content. He told Buell Frazier, a fellow book depository worker, who took him to work that morning, the package contained curtain rods for his boarding house room. Oswald’s wife and children lived with Ruth Paine and her family in the Dallas suburb of Irving. Oswald rented a room in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas under an alias. The Oswalds had marital problems and financial difficulties, causing the peculiar living arrangements. On Fridays after work, Frazier took Oswald to where Marina and their children were staying for the weekend. But on Thursday, November 21st, Oswald made special arrangements with Frazier to take him to Marina’s a day early, because he wanted to pick up some curtain rods. Oddly, Oswald never owned a car or had a driver’s license.

Oswald hadn’t stayed with Marina and their children the previous weekend, because there had been a birthday party. Their marriage of three years had been a stressful one, riddled with difficulties, primarily because of Oswald’s tortured behavior, his politics, and financial distress. Their previous weekend together was a difficult one, as would be his Thursday night stay before he shot Kennedy. Oswald went to bed early Thursday night in anger, pouting because of Marina’s animosity towards him. He left with Frazier for work early the next morning without seeing her. He placed his wedding ring and $140 in cash in the dresser. It was Friday, November 22nd.

Frazier lived nearby and saw Oswald waiting in his car that morning, which was peculiar, because Frazier usually got to the car first. As Frazier was climbing into his vehicle, he noticed a long paper package in the backseat. He asked Oswald about it and was told it contained the curtain rods. Frazier noticed that Oswald didn’t have a lunch with him.

When they arrived at the depository, Oswald walked ahead of Frazier, carrying the long brown package under his arm. Once in the building, Oswald took the concealed rifle to the sixth floor and returned to the second floor, where the building’s entrance was and the office. He picked up his clipboard with lists of books he needed to pull for shipment to schools. Frazier had worked for the Texas School Book Depository for the past month, a busy period when school districts ordered textbooks. Oswald had just returned from Mexico City in early October and needed a job. Linnie Mae and Ruth Paine teamed up and telephoned Roy Truly, the superintendent of the book depository about hiring Oswald. Truly told them to send Oswald down for an interview that afternoon.

Oswald had worked at a photography company in Dallas from October 1962 through April 1963. When he returned from Mexico City, he applied for work at Padgett Printing Corp. in Dallas but was turned down when his former employer would not recommend him, because he was a troublemaker and had communist tendencies. Truly interviewed Oswald and found that he was a nice young man, hiring him at $1.25 an hour. It was a temporary position, maybe just a few weeks. The book depository was a private business that warehoused school textbooks from various publishers in a seven story building. The books were stored primarily in the first, fifth, and sixth floors.

As October turned into November, there was less work at the book depository, so Truly, being a decent boss, wanted to keep the men employed for awhile longer. He busied them with placing new plywood flooring where the book stock was kept. This necessitated moving boxes of books around on each floor as they placed the plywood. Days prior to the assassination, boxes on the sixth floor had been moved to the east side. This allowed Oswald to place a shield of boxes around him on the southeast corner of the floor. Then he stacked up boxes in front of the window to rest his rifle during the shooting. His palm and finger prints were found everywhere and most importantly on his rifle, the stacked boxes, and the wrapping paper in which he had transported his rifle. A paraffin test was performed later at the police station finding that there was gunpowder residue on his cheek from firing a rifle.

The Assassination

As the presidential limousine entered Elm Street, there were cheers and waving from those scattered along the sidewalks. Cameras began snapping pictures and 8 mm home movie cameras began whisking. Abraham Zapruder was standing on a small abutment, operating his movie camera that would capture for the world on film the horrific event that was about to take place. At this time, Howard Leslie Brennan was sitting on a retaining wall at the corner of Houston and Elm streets, just across from the book depository. As he sat there, he saw a few onlookers at the book depository’s windows, but his eye caught a slender, young white man in the far southeastern window of the sixth floor, watching, and then leaving the window twice. Brennan’s line of vision was an estimated 110 feet to Oswald.

Also looking from across the street was teenager Amos Lee Eunis, who casually looked up, seeing what looked like a pipe sticking out of the southeastern window of the sixth floor. At this time, Oswald was lining up his rifle’s four-power scope as the presidential limousine passed below at 12 mph. The President’s head and shoulders were an estimated 180 feet from Oswald, but the scope diminished the distance to 45 feet or 15 yards. Not only was the target big in his scope but it was a “line shot,” with the Kennedy moving away from him in a direct line, the easiest shot in the world. Also, the boxes held his rifle firm and steady as he aimed. He pulled the trigger, with the first bullet striking the President in the back of the neck, exiting through his throat, entering Connally in the back, who was in front of him. The bullet then exited through Connally’s chest striking his wrist and leg. The bullet was found later in nearly perfect condition on Connally’s stretcher. It passed...
only through flesh, missing bone and organs.

The President did not topple frontward or sideways, because he was held up by his back brace. Using the bolt action on his rifle, Oswald already had another bullet in the chamber, and there was the President sitting upright only with his head tilted downward. Oswald fired the second shot striking Kennedy in the head, exploding the back of his skull and destroying much of his brain, mostly likely killing him instantly. This time the President fell left towards his wife. Oswald now had a third bullet in the chamber, firing it immediately and wildly. It was never found.

Euin heard the first shot and looked up, seeing the pipe in the sixth floor window once again, immediately knowing it was a rifle, seeing the assassin fire twice more and then pulled the rifle from the window. Brennan glanced up seeing the man in the sixth story window aiming his last shot. Then Brennan saw him draw his rifle back from the window, pausing to look to see if he hit his target, and then he disappeared.

Nearly everyone on the street and in the motorcade momentarily thought a car or a motorcycle had backfired. The sound of the rifle shots reverberated, echoing as in a bowl, with some glancing toward a grassy knoll ahead of the presidential limousine, while others looked around completely confused. Euin shouted, “There’s the gun!” to the passing motorcade. Euin immediately described the shooter to a motorcycle policeman, telling him he was a young slender white male, five feet ten. The policeman broadcasted the description over his radio. There were three other witnesses who saw a person shooting from the same sixth floor window. These witnesses along with Brennan and Euin would identify Oswald in a lineup at the Dallas Police station. Dealey Plaza was a mass of pandemonium as motorcycles and limousines sped off towards the freeway, heading to Parkland Hospital.

As Oswald fired the shots, three fellow employees were just below him on the fifth floor, eating their lunch and watching the motorcade. James Jarman, Jr., Harold Norman, and Bonnie Ray Williams heard three horrific blasts above them and the clinking of the spent cartridge cases hitting the floor. Debris from the ceiling floated downward on them, being jarred loose by the rifle’s discharges. Brennan had seen these men in fifth story window. Oswald told police later that he was eating with two employees at the time of the shooting. The three workers, seeing the activity below them, and having heard the rifle above, they froze in fear, staying put.

**Oswald’s Getaway**

Book depository employee, Charles Douglas Givens, was the last to see Oswald before the assassination. He saw him going to the sixth floor, carrying a clipboard. After shooting the President, Oswald stashed his rifle quickly between boxes and his clipboard near it, which showed he hadn’t worked that morning. He exited down the staircase and entered the lunchroom on the second floor. At this time a policeman came through with Oswald’s boss Truly and saw Oswald. The policeman pointed a gun at Oswald, whereby Truly said he worked there and was okay. They left Oswald who then was seen by employee Mrs. Robert A. Reid as he headed towards the front stairway, leading to exit door. Oswald was the only person who left the building just after the assassination.

Other policemen arrived and did a floor-by-floor search, finding on the sixth floor all the evidence Oswald had left behind: the rifle, three spend cartridges, the stacked boxes at the southeast window, and the paper bag that he used to carry the rifle. Nothing was touched, leaving everything for the crime inspectors. The book depository employees were lined up, with police checking their identification and questioning them. It was discovered quickly that Oswald was missing, with none of the workers knowing where he was at the moment or when the motorcade passed the building.

After Oswald left the building at 12:33 p.m., he walked several blocks eastward and boarded a westbound bus at 12:40 p.m. A former landlady of Oswald’s saw him enter the bus and noticed that he was agitated and hurried. Traffic in the area was backed up, because of the assassination. Oswald became impatient, asking the bus driver for a transfer ticket from downtown to Oak Cliff section of Dallas, and exited the bus at 12:44 p.m. Instead of boarding another bus, he walked two blocks and caught a taxicab at 12:48, with the driver transporting him a block or two away from him rooming house located at 1026 North Beckley Avenue. He left the taxi at 12:54, walked two blocks, and hurried into his room, grabbing his handgun and a light jacket. Back in January 1963, he purchased the gun, a Smith and Wesson .38 revolver, by mail order from Klein’s Sporting Goods Co. in Chicago under the name “A. Hidell.”

The room was registered under “O.H. Lee” and was fully furnished, including curtain rods and curtains; therefore, he had no need for the supposed curtain rods he carried in the paper bag to work. He arrived at the rooming house at 1 p.m., according to Mrs. R.C. Roberts, who worked there. She said he was on a dead run, ran to his room, and left at 1:03 p.m. She called to him, “You sure are in a hurry!” He said nothing, heading out to the street.

**Officer Tippit**

Oswald then walked briskly south on North Beckley Avenue for six blocks, turned east on Tenth Street and then encountered by Dallas Police Officer J.D. Tippit, who approached him from behind in his patrol car. It was thought by most that Oswald’s escape plan was to travel to Mexico. He was using public
transportation, and apparently had no accomplice to help him escape. It was theorized that Oswald was headed towards another bus stop for a bus that would take him out of town but Tippit accidentally put an end to that.

Tippit received a police bulletin that provided the description of the suspected assassin. He saw Oswald, stopped his police car at 1:15 p.m., stepped out the car, and told Oswald to put his hands on the windshield. Tippit came around to the curb where Oswald was, when Oswald pulled his handgun and shot Tippit four times. Eyewitness, Domingo Benavides, saw the entire tragic event from his pickup truck further up Tenth Street. He was driving toward them, heard a shot, ducked down, and pulled over to the curb, hearing additional discharges from Oswald's gun. Benavides looked up and saw Tippit stumble and fall. Oswald was on the sidewalk, throwing the empty cartridges to the side and then ran around the corner, entering Patton Street.

Benavides then ran to the police car and used the police radio to call in the shooting. He picked up the empty cartridges, handing them to the police when they arrived. There was another witness to the shooting. William W. Scroggins sat eating his lunch in his taxicab on Patton Street, near the corner of Tenth and Patton streets. He saw everything that Benavides described. It was 1:16 p.m., with Oswald turning at the corner entering Patton Street, jogging by Scroggins, being no more that 12 feet away, giving no indication that he saw the cabdriver. As Oswald passed Scroggins, he heard him mumble “poor dumb cop.”

There were further witnesses. When Oswald turned on Patton Street, he ran across the front yard of sisters-in-law Barbara Jeannette Davis and Virginia Davis. They were no further than 20 feet away, watching him emptying spent cartridges from his gun as he ran, which they picked up and handed later to police. They had heard the shots and saw the cabdriver in his car. As Oswald ran down Patton Street for the one block, two more witnesses saw him. Ted Callaway and Sam Guinyard were inside a house on Patton Street, and hearing the revolver shots, ran outside. They then saw Oswald trotting down the street, holding his gun. Callaway yelled out to Oswald, “Hey, man, what the hell is going on?” Oswald slowed his pace, stopped, and said something that was not understandable. Then he shrugged his shoulders, kept on running, and turned west at the next street corner on Jefferson Avenue.

At this point, Callaway ran to the police car, grab the microphone, and called police, just as Benevides had done. He then picked up the policeman’s gun and ran to Scroggins, telling him to drive his cab after the running Oswald. They drove around looking for him but were unsuccessful. There was yet another witness to the shooting. Helen Markham, a waitress, was walking to catch the bus for work. She saw Oswald fire his gun at Tippit and then run down Patton Street. These witnesses identified Oswald in a lineup at the Dallas Police station.

**Captured**

Oswald ran west on Jefferson Avenue for four blocks, when he heard a siren from a police car traveling rapidly on Jefferson. He ducked into the recessed entranceway of Hardy’s Shoe Shop, turning his back to the street. Watching him from inside was store manager, Johnny Calvin Brewer. He was listening to the radio and heard a news flash that a policeman had been shot eight blocks away. After the police car screamed by, Oswald looked over his shoulder, turned around, and continued west on Jefferson. A few doors down from Hardy’s was the Texas Theater, in which Oswald entered unnoticed at 1:40 p.m. The theater was featuring “Battle Cry” and “War Is Hell.” Brewer scampered out of his store and rushed towards the theater’s cashier box, asking the clerk if a man had just purchased a ticket. She told Brewer no that she had been listening to the radio. Brewer stepped into the darkened theater and saw shapes of 15 or 20 movie viewers. He returned to the cashier clerk, telling her to call police immediately.

Just before the police arrived, the theater manager turned on the house lights. Brewer looked from the theater’s curtains and saw Oswald. Brewer heard car noises in the alley and opened the exit door, letting the policemen inside. The officers walked onto the stage with Brewer, with him pointing to Oswald sitting near the back. Patrolman Nick McDonald was the first to reach Oswald, and it looked as though he was about to surrender, saying “Well, it is all over now.” But all at once Oswald swung at McDonald, and then he pulled his handgun to shoot the officer. But it didn’t fire, because the gun’s hammer came down on McDonald’s finger, jamming it. Then policemen swarmed over Oswald, handcuffing him. It was 1:50 p.m. Some of the early comments Oswald made
immediately after his arrest and before his interrogation at the Dallas Police station were: “This is it.” “I don’t know why you are treating me like this.” “The only thing I have done is carry a pistol into a movie.” “I don’t see why you handcuffed me.” “Why should I hide my face? I haven’t done anything to be ashamed of.” “I want a lawyer.” “I am not resisting arrest.” “I didn’t kill anybody.” “I haven’t shot anybody.” “I protest this police brutality.” “I fought back there, because I knew I wasn’t supposed to be carrying a gun.” And “What is this all about?”

**Interrogation**

Oswald arrived at the police station at 2:15 p.m., with Detective Jim Leavelle questioning him about the Tibbit shooting. Homicide Captain Will Fritz overheard and realized that this was the suspected assassin from the book depository. Fritz then took over and began Oswald’s first interrogation at 2:25 p.m., with Federal Special Agent James Hosty taking part. Leading the questioning was Fritz, who made notes later of the deliberations. Curiously, a recorder was not used, a stenographer was not used, and no one kept any type of written record. Fritz only made notes later as a reminder.

These are Oswald’s answers to questions asked by the interrogators from 2:25 to 4:04 p.m. in Fritz’s office: “My name is Lee Harvey Oswald. I work at the Texas School Book Depository Building.” “I have been employed there since October 15, 1963.” “My usual place of work is on the first floor; however, I frequently use the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh floors to get books.” “Because of all the confusion [of the assassination], I figured there would be no work performed that afternoon, so I decided to go home.” “I changed my clothing and went to a movie.” “I carried a pistol with me to the movie, because I felt like it, for no other reason.” “I didn’t shoot President John F. Kennedy or Officer J.D. Tippit.” “I never owned a rifle myself.” “I was present in the Texas School Book Depository Building.”

When arrested Oswald was in possession of a forged Selective Service card bearing the name Alek James Hidell with Oswald’s photograph. He was asked who was Alek James Hidell? He declined to answer, saying “You have the card yourself, and you know as much about it as I do.” He told them that he ate his lunch on the first floor and then went to the second floor to buy a Coca-Cola in the “Domino Room,” and it was then he saw a police officer. He said he saw Junior Jarmon and Harold Norman walk through Domino Room.

The second interrogation was again in Fritz’s office, which took from 4:45 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Oswald told those present: “When I left the Texas School Book Depository, I went to my room [at the rooming house], where I changed my trousers, got a pistol, and went to the picture show.” “You know what boys do when they have a gun, they carry it.” “The only package I brought to work was my lunch.” “I bought a pistol in Fort Worth several months ago.” “I refuse to tell you where the pistol was purchased.” “I never ordered any guns.” “I am not a malcontent. Nothing irritated me about the President.” “Everybody will know who I am now.”

At 6:30 p.m., Oswald was placed in a lineup to be identified, with all of the witnesses selecting Oswald. Then he saw reporters in the hallway and yelled out: “I didn’t shoot anyone.” “I want to get in touch with a lawyer, Mr. Abt in New York City.” “I never killed anybody.” “They’ve taken me in because of the fact that I lived in the Soviet Union.” “I’m just a patsy!” A reporter called out: “What did you do in Russia?” Oswald didn’t answer, but he replied to the question, “How did you hurt your eye?” He responded, “A policeman hit me.” At 7:10 p.m., Oswald was arraigned for the murder of Officer Tippit, and hours later at 1:35 a.m., Saturday, November 23, 1963, he was arraigned for the murder of John F. Kennedy.

Interrogation continued at 10:30 a.m., Saturday, ending at 1:10 p.m., with Captain Fritz doing the questioning. Some of Oswald’s answers were: “I never owned a rifle.” “I didn’t shoot John Kennedy.” “I didn’t even know Governor John Connally had been shot.” “I don’t own a rifle.” “I don’t own a rifle at all.” “I did have a small rifle some years in the past.”

**Visitations**

From 1:10 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., Oswald was visited by his Russian wife Marina and his mother, Marguerite Oswald. There was a glass partition between them, requiring the use of phones. Marina and Oswald spoke in Russian, because her English was limited. He smiled at her, and she told him that “I don’t believe you did that, and everything will turn out well.” She later commented that she didn’t think it proper to accuse her husband of the murders. Oswald told her not to worry, but she replied later that “I could see by his eyes that he was guilty. He tried to appear to be brave; however, by his eyes, I could tell that he was afraid. He did not believe himself [that everything would be fine]. He said goodbye to me with his eyes. I knew that.”

Oswald seemed very calm to his mother. She noticed he had been beaten, having black eyes and facial bruises. She said, “Honey, you are so bruised up, your face. What are they doing?” Marguerite disliked those in authority. He replied, “Mother, don’t worry. I got that in a scuffle. It’s a mistake, I’m not guilty.” She asked, “Is there anything I can do to help you?” He said, “No, Mother, everything is fine. I know my rights, and I have an attorney. Don’t worry about a thing.”

His brother, Robert Oswald, visited him from 3:30 p.m. to 3:40 p.m. They hadn’t seen each other for a year. Robert asked Oswald, “What in the Sam Hill is going on?” Oswald replied, “I don’t know.” Robert exclaimed, “You don’t know? Look, they got your pistol, they’ve got your rifle, they’ve got you charged with shooting the President and a police officer. And you tell me you don’t know. Now, I want to know just what’s going on.” At this point Oswald stiffened and his facial expression became very taunt. He said firmly and deliberately, “I just don’t know what they’re talking about. Don’t believe all this so-called evidence.” Robert studied Oswald’s face closely wanting to find answers in his brother’s eyes or expressions. Oswald realized what he was doing, telling him very quietly, “Brother, you won’t find anything there.” Robert then said he would get him an attorney. Oswald said, “No, you stay out of it.” His brother replied, “Stay out of it! It looks like I’ve been dragged into it.” Then Lee replied firmly, “I’m not going to have anybody from down here. I want this one [John Abt].” Robert answered, “Well, all right” and left.

Oswald had asked for legal representation several times. H. Louis Nichols, President of the Dallas Bar Association, talked to
him briefly from 3:30 to 3:40 p.m. Oswald reportedly said: “Well, I really don’t know what this is all about, that I have been kept incarcerated and kept incommunicado.” Oswald declined the Bar Association’s services saying he wanted to be represented by John Abt, who was the chief counsel to the Communist Party of USA, or by lawyers from the American Civil Liberties Union. Both Oswald and Ruth Paine tried to reach Abt by telephone several times but weren’t successful.

Oswald’s Comments

Fritz once again interrogated Oswald from 6 to 6:30 p.m. Oswald made this comment: “I have no receipts for purchase of any gun, and I have never ordered any guns. I do not own a rifle, never possessed a rifle.” Fritz asked if he was a communist, to which Oswald responded, “No, I am not a communist. I am a Marxist.”

At 8:55 p.m., a paraffin test was conducted on Oswald’s hands and right cheek in Fritz’s office to see if there was evidence of gun powder particles. Oswald declared to the Fritz, “I will not sign the fingerprint card until I talk to my attorney.” “What are you trying to prove with this paraffin test, that I fired a gun?” “You are wasting your time.” “I don’t know anything about what you are accusing me.”

There was a very brief press conference held from 11:20 to 11:25 p.m. Oswald was asked about his arraignment for the murders, with him responding: “Well, I was questioned by Judge Johnson; however, I protested at that time that I was not allowed legal representation during that very short and sweet hearing.” “I really don’t know what the situation is about.” “Nobody has told me anything except that I am accused of murdering a policeman.” “I know nothing more than that, and I do request someone to come forward to give me legal assistance.” Then he was asked if he killed the President. “No, I have not been charged with that. In fact, nobody has said that to me yet. The first thing I heard about it was the President. “No, I have not been charged with that. In fact, nobody has said that to me yet. The first thing I heard about it was the President. "I did not get it crushed. It was not on the back seat."

When questioned about ordering the rifle, he responded: “Never ordered any rifle by mail order or bought any money order for the purpose of paying for such a rifle. I never received a package sent to me through the mailbox in Dallas, Box No. 2915, under the name of Alek Hidell, absolutely not.” He denied ordering a rifle from Klein’s Sporting Goods Co. of Chicago; denied he went to Mexico City in September 1963; and claimed he was eating lunch at the time of the assassination.

When shown a photograph of him with the rifle that was used to kill Kennedy and the handgun used to kill Tippit, he claimed that it was a forged photograph with his head on someone else’s body. His image does look distorted in the photo. Actually, in March 1963, Marina had taken several photographs of Oswald in the backyard at Paine’s residence, with him posing with his rifle and handgun, while holding an issue of The Militant, a leftist newspaper that called Major General Edwin Walker a fascist. Oswald was dressed all in black in the photo. The series of such photographs Marina took were found in Paine’s garage, with the exception of one copy that had been given to a friend of Oswald’s, which he autographed. Marina had written in Russian on the photo “Hunter of Fascist, Ha-Ha-Ha!!” (She commented years later about the photo: “There was Lee! Dressed in black – an idiot!”) After Marina took two pictures, he changed positions and posed again. She asked him, “Why are you wearing that stupid outfit?” He replied, “For posterity.” She told him, “Yes, it will be very nice for the children to remember all that, standing there with all those guns.” She said he just mumbled some stupid excuse in embarrassment, signifying that it was “obviously dumb.” Quite possibly, Oswald could have taken his head from one photo and placed it on his body in another photo, liking that pose better. He had access to equipment at the
photography shop where he worked at the time to do the procedure.

Oswald’s End

When the final interrogation at the city jail was completed, Oswald asked for a sweater. A black one was given to him, which blended with his black pants. He now was dressed in black, just like in the photograph that Marina took. It was now time for Oswald to be transferred to the county jail. The armored vehicle was waiting for him in the underground garage. Two police officers advised Fritz to take Oswald through another exit, because there was a horde of newsmen waiting for him in the underground. Police Detective James R. Leavelle commented that “the hallway inside the police station was crowded with reporters, newsmen, and television cameramen. I was plumb up to my chin with those people. One time when I was trying to escort some witness out of there, I stopped and I looked down, and there was a joker with a camera stuck between my legs taking pictures.”

But the press had hounded Police Chief Jesse E. Curry to allow a photo opportunity with Oswald. Realizing the necessity of proper public relations during the coming intense moment, he yielded to them. He and Oswald would face the throng of news people in the underground garage. Out stepped Curry from the exit door into the underground garage with Oswald handcuffed at his side. The tall Police Chief was all in white, wearing his Sunday ice cream suit and a white Texas hat. Next to him strutted a smaller man, the accused murderer Oswald, dressed in black, who had refused to wear a head cover to hide his face. This was the moment Oswald had been waiting for in his delusions. His face revealed everything. He had an amused look, a smugness, with his eyes flashing a previous statement, “They know who I am now.” He had entered the world stage. He had joined the regicide assassins of history, the king killers, the depositories of tyranny and the fighters of the revolution. “Long live Karl Marx! Long Live Fidel Castro!” seemed to reverberate from the smooth concrete walls.

They were instantly blinded by strobe lights and flashbulbs from the multitude of media men. It was now 11:21 p.m. From nowhere steps a local night club owner, Jack Ruby, shooting Oswald point blank in his left side with his snub-nosed revolver, destroying all of his lower internal organs instantly. The presidential assassin, now blank in his left side with his snub-nosed revolver, destroying all of his lower internal organs instantly. The presidential assassin, now clearly by millions on television. Then he melted into surrounding arms. He was rushed to Parkland Hospital where he died quickly, but not before he was asked to confess to being Kennedy’s assassin. He shook his head, no.

Jack Ruby

In the meantime, the murderer Ruby was wrestled to the ground, crying out “I’m Jack Ruby!” A policeman exclaimed, “Jack, you son-of-a-bitch!” He had just complicated matters, because shooting Oswald now opened doors to conspiracy theories and a vast number of other questions. Ruby knew the Dallas policemen quite well. He had been at Oswald’s press conference on Saturday, with his revolver tucked in his pant’s waist. Loquacious Ruby quickly told the police he shot Oswald to prevent Jackie Kennedy from having to appear at the assassin’s trial. It was all for her he said over and over again. There could have been other reasons, because Ruby’s activities with the Mafia and others raised major questions.

But, he did in fact come upon the scene serendipitously, having just walked from the Western Union Office nearby. He left his house at 11 a.m., Sunday, and drove to Western Union to wire some money to one of his employees. While driving past the police station, he noticed a large crowd of bystanders. He knew that Oswald was to be transferred to the county jail. He thought he would stop by after sending the telegram. Ruby waited in a short line at Western Union and purchased a telegram that was stamped 11:17 a.m. He left his favorite dog in his car, and strolled to the police station, walking down the ramp with no one stopping him. He saw Oswald, pulled his revolver, and shot him. It was 11:21 a.m. It was by chance and emotion that Ruby killed Oswald.

During questioning, Ruby remarked, “No one else requested me to do anything. I never spoke to anyone about attempting to do anything. No subversive organization gave me an idea. No underworld person made any effort to contact me. Suddenly the feeling, the emotional feeling came within me that someone owed this debt to our beloved President to save her [Jackie] the ordeal of coming back.” He also told police that he did not know Oswald.

The Other Oswalds

Marguerite, Marina, and her babies were staying at a local hotel. It was 11:30 a.m., when Robert Oswald and a family friend rushed into the hotel room and told the women to pack quickly. There were shoes on the floor, clothes on hangers, and washed diapers drying on clothing lines. Marguerite and Marina were not watching television when Oswald was shot, so they weren’t aware of the urgency. Once packed, they rushed downstairs and saw Secret Service men and police everywhere. They were to be taken to Robert Oswald’s in-laws’ ranch, but that was changed quickly because of security. It was decided then that Police Chief Curry’s residence would be better. When they arrived, Marguerite overheard conversations of Secret Service agents. She asked, “My son is gone, isn’t he?” She was told in affirmative that he was dead. Then she spoke to Marina saying, “Marina, our boy is gone.” They cried, holding on to one another. Marguerite then demanded that they be taken to see his body.

At Parkland Hospital, they were led to the emergency room, where the President and Connally had been two days before. Oswald’s body was lying on an operating table surrounded by law
enforcement and doctors. Marguerite wanted to make sure it was her son. She was a nurse and had seen death before. It surprised her though when Marina walked up to Oswald’s body and pulled up his eyelids.

In broken English, she said quietly, “He cry. He eyes wet.” She looked at a doctor, and he replied, “Yes.”

While leaving the room, Marguerite told the policemen standing around, “I think some day you will hang your heads in shame.” They were then notified that Secret Service protection had ended for them.

**Mourning**

The nation mourned their assassinated President for four days. They watched the solemn process of honoring him in state at the White House and the Capitol. Diplomats, heads of state, dignitaries, and the nation’s leaders gathered to pay their last respects. On Monday, November 25th, President John F. Kennedy was laid to rest on a hillside at Arlington National Cemetery, with a single eternal flame flickering in memoriam at his gravesite. There was the sad sound of taps cascading on the wind, echoing through the graceful valley of crosses and Stars of David.

Three hours later Oswald was buried at Rose Hill Cemetery. Robert Oswald telephoned the Greater Dallas Council of Churches for a minister to serve a brief graveside service. They declined to send anyone, but Rev. Louis Saunders of Fort Worth Council of Churches agreed to come. Oswald was buried in a simple wood coffin covered by a cotton cloth. The casket was opened momentarily to allow the family to view the body. A few news reporters were commandeered for pall bearers, while Dallas Police held back the rest of the media to give the family some privacy.

**Cronkite Concludes**

After four days of constant coverage, Cronkite concluded CBS News programming stating:

“It is said that the human mind has a greater capacity for remembering the pleasant than the unpleasant. But today was a day [Kennedy’s funeral] that will live in memory and in grief. Only history can write the importance of this day. Were these dark days the harbinger of even blacker ones to come, or like the black before the dawn shall they lead to some still as yet indiscernible sunrise of understanding among men, that violent words, no matter what their origin or motivation, can lead only to violent deeds? This is the larger question that will be answered, in part, in the manner that a shaken civilization seeks the answers to the immediate question:

Who, and most importantly what, was Lee Harvey Oswald? The world’s doubts must be put to rest. Tonight there will be a few Americans who will go to bed without carrying with them the sense that somehow they have failed. If in the search of our conscience we find a new dedication to the American concepts that brook no political, sectional or racial divisions, then maybe it may yet be possible to say that John Fitzgerald Kennedy did not die in vain. That’s the way it is, Monday, November 25, 1963. This is Walter Cronkite, good night.”

**Camelot**

Five days after the funeral, Jackie was interviewed at Hyannis Port by Theodore White, journalist, historian, and a Kennedy speech writer. *Life* magazine published White’s article in its December 6th issue. Jackie told White that Jack had been a sickly boy, and to occupy his time, he spent hours reading about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. She said that he adored Lerner and Loewe’s Broadway musical “Camelot,” and would play its recording before sleeping. She said he especially loved the lines:

Don’t let it be forgot,
That once there was a spot,
For one brief shining moment,
That was known as Camelot.

White wrote in his article: “The Kennedy administration had been Camelot, a magic moment in American history, when gallant men danced with beautiful women, when great deeds were done, when artists, writers, and poets met at the White House and the barbarians beyond the walls were held back. But it will never be that way again. There’ll never be another Camelot.”

Written by Robert LeRoy Santos

**Resources:** the major resources utilized in this issue of SHQ were the *Modesto Bee* and the *Turlock Journal*. Published works were consulted. For important publications see: Final Disclosure by David W. Belin, *An Unfinished Life* by Robert Dallek, *JFK: The Presidency* by Herbert S. Permet, and *Oswald’s Tale* by Norman Mailer.

**Cover:** Warren Commission photos

**Stanislaus Historical Quarterly**

*Stanislaus Historical Quarterly* is published four times a year, featuring freshly researched articles on Stanislaus County history. Currently, there is no charge per subscription or individual issues, but readers must notify the editor to be placed on the mailing list. Ideas for articles or historical information concerning topics of county history may be sent to the editor. This is a non-profit educational publication. *Stanislaus Historical Quarterly* is edited, copyrighted, and published by Robert LeRoy Santos, Alley-Cass Publications, Tel: 209.634.8218. Email: blsantos@csustan.edu. Ellen Ruth Wine Santos is assistant editor and proofreader.
ASSASSINATION NEWS READ BY
STANISLAUS COUNTY RESIDENTS
MODESTO BEE AND TURLOCK JOURNAL

This article contains newspaper stories read by Stanislaus County residents in the Modesto Bee and Turlock Journal concerning President Kennedy’s assassination from November 22, 1963 and somewhat into the following year. Television played a significant conveyor of news during the first few days, with radio being a secondary choice, when television was unavailable. Newspapers maintained their dominance though and popularity by providing indepth reporting of information in greater length, supplemented by commentaries and letters from the readership. Newspapers were a tangible resource, because they could be viewed over and over again when desired. Even though electronic media was captivating, newspapers remained traditional information sources for households.

County subscribers pored over the Modesto Bee and Turlock Journal daily, gleaning stories about the assassination, related events, and germane issues. Readers consumed the newspapers daily to help form their impressions, spark discussions, and to apply what they learned to their everyday modern world, changing every moment. The following is a lengthy account of the assassination and resulting issues, filling in the gaps of the first article’s factual content. The stories are syndicated from the Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI), and McClatchy Newspapers, publisher of the Modesto Bee. Let’s dust off the newspaper issues and return 50 years ago to that dreadful day, November 22, 1963.

First Reports
The headline on the front page of the Turlock Journal of November 22, 1963 read: “Chief Executive, Texas Governor, Cut Down By Bullets While Touring Downtown Dallas.” The article was written by UPI reporter Merriman Smith in Dallas. The opening paragraph encapsulated the essence of the slaying:

“President Kennedy was assassinated today in a burst of gunfire in downtown Dallas. Texas Governor John Connally was shot down with him. Kennedy died 30 minutes after the shot was fired. A single shot through the right temple [later changed to the back of his head] took the life of the 46 year-old Chief Executive. He was shot as he rode in an open car in downtown Dallas and was waving and smiling to a crowd of 250,000. A terribly shocked Johnson, who has a record of heart illness, was whisked off under heavy guard to be sworn in as quickly as possible. Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy was riding in the same car with her husband. She was not hurt. She cradled her husband’s head in her arms as he was sped, dying, to the hospital. Kennedy was shot at approximately 12:30 a.m. Central Standard Time [CST] or 10:30 p.m. Pacific Standard Time [PST].”

Smith wrote that Charles Brehm, 38, from Dallas, was standing on the curbside, a mere 15 feet away. He remarked that President Kennedy was riding along in the presidential limousine and “was waving, and the first shot hit him and then that awful look crossed his face.” Brehm declared that there were “at least three bursts of gunfire.” Dallas Police searched the grassy knoll and park area at Dealey Plaza. Secret Service agents with automatic rifles and handguns fanned out and searched everywhere looking for the assassin or assassins. A young man was seen being questioned by policeman on the roadway. A Dallas reporter claimed “he saw a rifle being withdrawn from a window on the fifth or sixth floor of the office building shortly after the gunfire.” Dallas Police stated that a rifle, 7.65 Mauser, German Army rifle, with a telescopic sight, had been found on the staircase of the fifth floor, with three spent shell cartridges nearby. (In actuality, the rifle was an Italian surplus Mannlicher-Carcano 6.5 mm military rifle and was discovered stashed between boxes of books on the sixth floor.)

Parkland Hospital
Smith’s article continued:

“The article told of Kennedy’s wounds as seen by a team of doctors. Dr. Malcolm Perry described that “there was an entrance wound below his Adam’s Apple. There was another wound in the back of his head.” Two other physicians of ten in attendance remarked, “It was possible the same bullet caused both wounds. It was possible that he was hit by two bullets, but it was doubtful.” (A later autopsy in Washington, D.C. at a naval hospital would clarify the types of wounds.) The media was told that Kennedy’s throat was opened to allow breathing, and he was given intravenously fluids and blood. The doctors tried to maintain respiration, but all was in vain. There was really little hope.

Smith wrote that outside the hospital “the red rose bouquet, presented to Mrs. Kennedy at Dallas Love Field on their arrival a short time before, lay on the floor in the back of the presidential limousine.” He commented that the President’s body was carried from the hospital in a casket and placed in a hearse, with curtains pulled. Mrs. Kennedy escorted her husband’s body throughout. Malcolm Kilduff, White House Secretary, told the press that the President’s body would be flown to Washington, D.C. immediately.

Smith reported that Governor Connally was “in serious condition and in great pain.” He told an aide to “take care of [his
wife] Nellie.” The Texas Governor “was hit in the chest” and also “suffered a wrist and a minor wound in the leg.” The plan was for the presidential party to attend a luncheon at the new Trade Mart, where President Kennedy would speak to a gathering of 2,000. Then they would travel to Austin and then to Vice President Lyndon Johnson’s LBJ Ranch, staying the night.

Assassin Captured

Smith described the capturing of the suspected assassin, which has some inaccuracies due to the immediacy of the reporting:

“Police received a quick tip that a man suspected as the assassin had entered the Texas Theater. Policemen J.D. Tippit and M. N. MacDonald ran into a rear exit in pursuit. An usher told them a man in a brown shirt had entered the darkened movie house a few moments before. They spotted their quarry. Tippit fired a shot, and the suspect returned the fire. MacDonald rushed at the suspect, who yelled, ‘It’s all over now.’ The two men fought in the seats, the police reported, and MacDonald’s face was slashed before the man was subdued and seized.” [Officer Tippit had been killed eight blocks from the theater by Oswald, and MacDonald’s face was not slashed.]

A New President

The Modesto Bee’s report on November 22, 1963 by AP was headlined: “Assassin Bullets Kills Kennedy. Sniper Bullets Wound Texas Gov. Connally.” It contained similar information as the UPI account in the Turlock Journal, with this addition:

“Johnson, who was Kennedy’s Vice President, automatically succeeded to the presidency. The new Chief Executive took the oath of office at 2:39 p.m. [CST]. It was the first time in history that the presidential oath was administered by a woman, U.S. District Judge Sarah T. Hughes. The ceremony took place aboard the presidential jet transport, Air Force One, while parked at Dallas’ Love Field. It then took off immediately, flying to Washington, D.C. for Johnson to quickly establish his administration.”

A UPI article in the Bee on November 22nd described Jackie kneeling on the limousine’s floor, covering her husband, and later at the hospital helping to lift him onto a stretcher. The article characterized Jackie as being “stunned as she entered the hospital.” White House aides remarked that Mrs. Kennedy first thought after her husband’s death “was to be with her children, Caroline and John, Jr.” Jackie accompanied the casket containing the slain President to Love Field and boarded Air Force One. She was embraced by Mrs. Johnson and joined witnesses, who watched Lyndon Johnson being sworn in as the next President. She then sat next to the casket during the flight to Washington, D.C.

Assassination Descriptions

A UPI Bee article positioned Texas Governor and his wife Nellie sitting in a jump seat facing the Kennedys. This was corrected in subsequent articles to the Connallys sitting in the jump seat, facing forward. Nellie told reporters that “they had just gone through town and were pleased at the reception they had just received.” She then heard a shot and her husband “turned in his seat and almost instantly was hit.” She couldn’t say where the third shot went but that it may have been the one that hit Connally’s wrist. She commented that “Jackie grabbed the President, and she grabbed her husband, and they both ducked down in the car. A Secret Service agent grabbed the limousine telephone and said: ‘Let’s go straight to the nearest hospital.’” Nellie couldn’t remember if her husband said anything.

A year later, on November 23, 1964, Jackie provided the public with the comments she made to the 1964 President’s Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy (Warren Commission) on June 5, 1964. Her statement is important to include here. She remarked:

“Mrs. Connally [Nellie] said we will soon be there. We could see a tunnel [freeway underpass]. Everything was really slow then. And I remembered thinking it would be cool under that tunnel. The car moved towards it, and that is when she [Nellie] said to President Kennedy: ‘You certainly can’t say that the people of Dallas haven’t given you a nice welcome.’ I think he [President Kennedy] said, I don’t know if I remember it or if I have read it: ‘No, you certainly can’t,’ or something. And you know then the car was very slow, and there weren’t very many people around. You know, there is always noise in a motorcade, and there are always motorcycles beside us, a lot of them backfiring. So I was looking to the left. I guess there was a noise, but it didn’t seem like any different noise really because there is so much noise, motorcycles and things. But then suddenly Governor Connally was yelling, ‘Oh, no, no, no!’ I was looking this way, to the left, and I heard these terrible noises, you know. And my husband never made any sound. So I turned to the right, and all I remember is seeing this sort of quizzical look on his face, and his hand was up, it must have been his left hand. And just as I turned and looked at him, I could see a piece of his skull and I remember it was flesh colored. I remember thinking he just
looked as if he had a slight headache, and I just remember seeing that. No blood or anything. And then he sort of did this (indicating), put his hand to his forehead and fell in my lap. And then I just remember falling on him and saying ‘Oh, no, no, no!’ I mean, ‘Oh my God, they have shot my husband.’ And ‘I love you Jack,’ I remember shouting. And just being down in the car with his head in my lap. And it just seemed an eternity.”

Jackie told the Warren Commission that she might have saved her husband if she only had pulled him down quickly when the first shot hit him.

The UPI article observed that Jackie was in “a merciful blackout” at that point. She didn’t remember crawling on the back of the car to pull the Secret Service agent on board. She did remember the motorcade speeding away. Ladybird (Mrs. Johnson) later commented that “the most searing moment of that tragic day came when I saw Jacqueline, ‘that immaculate woman,’ wearing a glove caked with her husband’s blood. 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.’ ” Ladybird said, “Mrs. Kennedy made things easy as possible for us,” even though in paralyzing grief.

Vice President Johnson was led by Secret Service agent Rufus Youngblood to a room at the hospital and told not to leave under any circumstances. This was the agent who heard gunshot and covered the Vice President in his limousine. Johnson remarked, “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, and vigorous. I could not believe now that he was dead. I was shocked and sickened.”

Governor Connally later told the Warren Commission that when he heard the first shot he identified it immediately as coming from a rifle. He turned to look over his right shoulder and then his left, “but I never got that far in my turn. And then I felt like someone had hit me in the back.” He quickly became covered with blood and “thought I had probably been fatally hit.”

**Reporter’s Description**

One AP reporter described the early morning of November 22nd. He noted that he looked outside the hotel window in Fort Worth, and it was drizzly. Down in the lobby, he saw a smiling President step out of the elevator with Johnson and Connally. The sun was peeking through, while Kennedy spoke briefly to a crowd outside in the parking lot. He was in “high good humor,” as he explained with a grin to those gathered that Mrs. Kennedy was making preparations for her appearance, stating that “It takes a thought I had probably been fatally hit.”

The AP reporter was riding in a press car a few vehicles behind the presidential limousine:

“I heard a loud report. My first thought was: Those Texans! Now they are shooting off giant firecrackers. Then came two more reports paced possibly five seconds apart. They had the ominous sound of rifle crack. The President’s car had stopped. We reporters riding ‘pool’ scrambled to get out to run ahead. But at almost that instant a Secret Service agent, riding in the front seat of the presidential limousine stood up, phone in hand and waved the preceding police cruiser on. In that numbed moment we all sensed that something horrible might have happened. But we had no way of knowing exactly what as we thundered along a freeway at top speed in pursuit of the presidential car. Everybody in the President’s car seemed to be down, but that would be prescribed procedure in escaping any danger zone.

We careened around a turn and roared into the driveway of Parkland Hospital. When we screeched to a stop I saw, as I scrambled out of the ‘pool’ car, Mrs. Kennedy weeping, trying to hold her husband’s head up. Mrs. Connally was supporting the governor who sat slumped in a jump seat, his head rolled back, his suit and shirt front covered in blood. By the time I had sprinted up to the presidential limousine, Secret Service agents were helping Mrs. Kennedy. Hospital attendants were slipping Connally onto a stretcher. When I reached the car there was the President sprawled on his face in the rear seat. There was a pool of blood on the floor. Three twisted and torn red roses lay in it. ‘Is he dead?’ I asked a Secret Service agent who stood guard. ‘I don’t know, but I don’t think so,’ he replied.

As I rushed for a telephone, Vice President Johnson was being escorted up a corridor to a cubicule near the receiving desk. At the desk I found a phone, got the AP bureau on the line and shouted: ‘The President’s been shot.’ Then I began the agonizing wait for some official word on the President’s condition. Some congressional members, White House staffers, and even a priest, who had been in the emergency room with him, were not sure. There was a report Johnson had been shot and one that he had a heart attack. When Mrs. Johnson came out of the emergency room, accompanied by Secret Service agents, I jumped in front of them and asked, ‘Is Lyndon all right?’ ‘Yes,’ she replied. Her eyes were wet with tears. ‘Is the President dead?’ I asked. One of the Secret Service agents spurned me backward as she [Mrs. Johnson] went on without answering. A few minutes later Malcolm Kilduff, Acting Press Secretary, rushed out, yelling: ‘Follow me, I’ve got an announcement!’ As we raced after him, we knew the President must be dead but still clung to hope. It died with finality of the announcement. A shining light had gone out.”
A Photo for the Decades

Official White House photographer, Captain Cecil Stoughton of the U.S. Signal Corps, saw the Johnsons rush by him exiting the hospital heading towards a parked vehicle. He knew then the President was dead, and his duty was to stay with the next President, so he hitched a ride in one of the speeding cars to Love Field. Once there, Kilduff said, “Thank God you’re here. Mr. Johnson will be sworn in right here on the plane in a few minutes. You will be the only photographer. Is there a recording technician from the Signal Corps available to record the ceremony?” Stoughton told him that the only recording device aboard the aircraft was the dictating machine on the President’s desk. Stoughton described his ordeal:

“When the ceremony was due to start, I wrestled with a tough decision. Naturally I wanted to use color film, but I knew that the whole world would be waiting for pictures of a swearing in, probably the most unique in American history. I settled for black and white. I felt that color would have taken too long to process. In the space of a few seconds, there flashed through my mind everything that can go wrong with a camera, even the best of them. Half a minute later, at 2:40 p.m., it was all over. I found myself drenched in sweat and trembling with tension. I had been able to take three pictures. Kilduff thrust the tape into my hand and said, ‘Cecil, get going. You know what to do.’ I was the first person off the plane, and the last words I heard from the cabin were those of President Johnson: ‘Let’s get this plane moving to Washington.’ As I raced into Dallas, the awesome thought struck me: ‘I was carrying the only permanent records, both audio and visual, of the historic ceremony. And I was the only person in the world, outside of that small cabin, who knew that a new President of the United States had been sworn into office.’ The rest was purely mechanical. Luckily my pictures had come out well, and the tape recorder had been faithful to Mr. Kilduff. Within minutes both were going out over the world’s news networks.”

Captain Stoughton had done his job so well that while President Johnson was flying to Washington, D.C. aboard Air Force One, he saw and heard his own swearing in on the airplane’s television.

Red Oswald

Another AP article in the Bee on November 22nd covered the capture of Lee Harvey Oswald. The headline read: “Self Styled Red Is Chief Suspect.” The opening paragraph was quite accurate for a first reporting:

“Police seized as a prime suspect in the assassination of President Kennedy, a 24 year-old former Marine and self-styled communist, who once renounced his American citizenship and unsuccessfully sought to become a Soviet citizen. The man was identified as Lee H. Oswald, chairman of a Fair Play for Cuba Committee [in New Orleans]. He was seized in a movie theater after killing a policeman. The police found a Dallas address for Oswald.”

Also, the article noted that Oswald had been in New Orleans two months before and was arrested “for passing out allegedly pro-communist literature.”

A Stunned World

Most Americans received word of the President’s assassination from radio, television, telephone or word of mouth. Millions remained glued to their television from Friday through Monday. The three television broadcasting networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, canceled all programming and commercials for the four days, carrying nothing but events surrounding the assassination, ending with the President’s burial.

There was quick reaction to the assassination at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), suspending all business at 2:10 p.m. EST on Friday, November 22nd, not opening until the following Tuesday. In 30 minutes before they closed, Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 21 points, which was the “wildest burst of panic selling in anyone’s memory in U.S. stock markets across the nation.” The Pacific Coast Stock Exchange closed immediately after the NYSE.

A stunned world began forwarding messages to the White House, becoming an avalanche of words of sympathy, love, caring, and praise for the slain President. Former Vice President Richard Nixon called the assassination a “terrible tragedy,” expressing the “deepest sorrow” from Mrs. Nixon and him to “to the [Kennedy] family in this hour of sorrow.” He had been in Dallas the day before the assassination, leaving the next morning from Love Field just before Air Force One landed. He was there representing his New York law firm in business concerning Pepsi Company. Chief Justice Earl Warren was “stunned and shocked,” having just seen the President on Wednesday at a “Judiciary Reception” held at the White House. New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller called the assassination “a terrible tragedy for the nation and the world. May God grant strength and guidance to Lyndon Johnson as he assumes his grave responsibilities under the tragic circumstances.”

Former President Herbert Hoover, now 89, was “shocked and grieved,” commenting, “He [Kennedy] loved America and has given his life for his country.” Former President Harry S. Truman was so stricken by the assassination that couldn’t express his
feelings as yet. Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., U.S. Ambassador to South Viet Nam, also was stunned and grappling for words, saying, “I was very fond of him and knew him intimately. Lately we have been particularly close, because he guided America’s foreign policy. He took keen personal interest in it and gave it a great deal of personal time.”

Messages of sorrow and sympathy came from the various countries of the world. French President Charles de Gaulle, who had been the target of two assassination attempts, commented that “President Kennedy died as a soldier, under fire, for his duty and in the service of his country. In the name of the French people, a friend at all time of the American people, I salute this great example and this great memory [we have of the President].”

A UPI article in the Turlock Journal reported that “President Kennedy was mourned around the world today on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Heads of state acclaimed him. Persons on the streets of London, Tokyo, Paris, and Berlin grieved, as did many in communist capitals. Newspapers eulogized him.” Five months ago, while visiting Berlin and looking at the Berlin Wall, President Kennedy told the 80,000 present “Ich bin ein Berliner” (I am a Berliner). His declaration steeled the will of Berliners, and they loved him for his bold and personal commitment to them. When Berliners heard of his assassination, they wept and marched in a torchlight procession through the night. West German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard said Kennedy “embodied the Western ideals of freedom and the dignity of man.” A Russian student stood outside the U.S. Embassy in Moscow said softly, “Kennedy was another Lincoln.”

The London Daily Herald headline read: “Rest in peace, John Kennedy. You helped us much.” Queen Elizabeth II remarked that she was “shocked and horrified.” The tenor bells of Westminster Abbey rang out a requiem, a performance reserved only for royalty. Italian flags flew at half-staff, with Italian President Antonio Segni calling the assassination “a grave loss for all humanity.” Pope Paul VI, who saw Kennedy twice, held a special Mass, calling the assassination “a wicked crime,” and prayed that his sacrifice might help “the cause of peace and freedom.” Catholic Bishop Herman Westermann of Sambalpur, India, compared Kennedy’s death to “loss of Mohandas Gandhi,” both servants of peace.

Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev cables President Johnson that the assassination was “a heavy blow to all people who hold dear the cause of peace and Soviet-American cooperation.” Yugoslavian President Tito sent a message to Johnson as well, saying, “President Kennedy’s tragic death has deeply moved and embittered us.” Egyptian President Gamal Nasser cabled Mrs. Kennedy that he was “shocked by this horrific crime which took the life of your husband in the prime of his youth.”

The Bee and the Turlock Journal continued carrying articles on the assassination from AP and UPI on the next day, Saturday, November 23rd. One article provided in detail a chronology of events from 10:35 a.m. CST, when the Air Force One landed at Love Field, to 12 noon, when the President died. It was officially announced that Kennedy had been struck by two bullets: one in the back of his neck and the other his head.

**President Johnson Begins**

A stunned and sorrowing President Johnson proclaimed Monday, November 25th to be a national day of mourning for “a great and good man, the martyred John F. Kennedy.” He called upon all Americans to assemble in their churches to pay “homage of love and reverence” for the nation’s slain leader. Johnson called upon the peoples of the world “who share our grief to join us in Monday’s day of mourning and rededication.”

It was reported that Johnson took to the presidential task swiftly, rallying the national government, whose members were distraught by the assassination. He first conferred with Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Kennedy’s cabinet members. He told the media that he planned to carry forth President Kennedy’s work concerning civil rights and the New Frontier, and internationally the U.S. would absolutely remain the strongest power on earth. There was no question that Americans felt assured that President Johnson would not break stride. He would carry the nation forth in proud fashion deemed worthy of the strong democracy. He asked for prayer, while he slipped away for prayer at a church across the street from the White House. The burden was heavy for the new President, and he needed all the help he could muster, spiritual and temporal.

**Assassination Evidence**

In the meantime in Dallas, it was reported by Dallas Police that more and more evidence was piling up that Oswald was the sole assassin. Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry told media that photographs were found at Oswald’s home showing him with the rifle that killed the President and wounded the Governor, and the handgun that killed Dallas Police Officer Tippit. Oswald’s Russian born wife, Marina, identified the weapons as his. He was formally charged with murdering Kennedy and Tippit, and wounding Connally. Curry told reporters that the FBI had a letter in Oswald’s handwriting ordering the rifle from a Chicago mail order house. He used an alias to purchase it, with the rifle being mailed to a Dallas Post Office box. Dallas Police Homicide Captain Will Fritz made it clear that “this man killed the President.” District Attorney Henry Wade said he was “confident of getting the death penalty for Oswald.” The grand jury would meet the coming week, with Oswald’s trial beginning mid-January 1964. Wade said, “He would see the electric chair at Huntsville State Prison.”

Curry commented to the press that Oswald had undergone extensive questioning since his arrest but would not make a statement of guilt or sign one. The Police Chief asserted that Oswald was shown pictures of him with his weapons and other evidence but maintains his innocence. He declined taking lie detector tests. Curry remarked that Oswald declared, “I didn’t kill the President. I didn’t kill the President. I didn’t kill anybody.” The assassin sought out John Abt, a New York lawyer, who defends communists, for his defense. Curry commented that Oswald readily admitted he was a communist and a Castro sympathizer. [Actually, he claimed to be a Marxist rather than a communist. A Marxist was a theoretician, while a communist implemented Marx’s theories.] Oswald, the Police Chief said, could be categorized as “a political misfit.” He told reporters that Dallas Police didn’t have a file on Oswald, but the FBI did and had interviewed him a week or so earlier. He quickly
commented that he was not criticizing the FBI for withholding information on Oswald, because the FBI was not obligated to share information with local law enforcement.

Curry remarked that ballistics tests on the rifle are very encouraging. Oswald had been a “marksman” [actually a “sharpshooter”] while in the Marines. Also, paraffin tests were done on his hands showing gunpowder residue, indicating that he had fired a weapon a short time before. The Police Chief commented that a policeman entered the book depository right after the assassination and pulled a gun on Oswald, who was in the second floor lunch room. The superintendent of the book depository told the policeman that Oswald worked there, saying “he is okay.” Oswald was allowed to go. Curry noted that when Oswald left the building, he was stopped by another policeman, to whom he remarked that he worked in the building and was out to see what happened on the street. Later, Oswald told police investigators that he was in the movie theater when the assassination took place.

One article noted there was a steady stream of witnesses arriving at the Dallas Police station. The District Attorney Wade claimed he now had 15 witnesses. Oswald’s wife, Marina, and his mother, Marguerite Oswald, were also at the police station. Oswald was ordered held without bond by Justice of the Peace David Johnston. The article continued with the details of the story of Oswald’s failed escape, the death of Tippit, and Oswald’s capture at the theater.

Another article on November 23rd, spoke to the shame of Texas, and the toll the assassination would have on the proud state. But it was believed that one fanatical slayer would not “extinguish the patriotic heritage of the Lone Star State.” The article labeled the slayer as a coward, ambushng the President from behind with a military rifle bearing a high-powered scope. He pumped bullets into a helpless victim, who had no chance. The article remarked that it was well-known that fanatics in Dallas were prone to violence. Only 30 days before, U.N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson was accosted, spat upon, and struck by a picket’s placard by right-wingers. Many didn’t want Kennedy to go to Dallas, because the political climate was troubling. The article observed that Texans felt it heavily. They were grieved and holding memorial services. The Texas state government met in joint session, mourning jointly over the death of the President, demonstrating unity as Democrats and Republicans.

**Ambulance Driver**

UPI and AP continued their coverage on Sunday, November 24th. The Bee printed an article by Aubrey Rike, an ambulance driver, providing his and his assistant Dennis McGuire’s observations at Parkland Hospital on November 22nd. They had just brought in a patient and were standing at the emergency desk, when two Secret Service agents barged into the emergency room, with one yelling: “We need some stretchers now!” The other agent, who was carrying a machinegun, called out, “All right, everybody clear out of here!” Rike and McGuire moved their patient aside, and just then Vice President Johnson strode through the doors, walking peculiarly, being so pale, we thought he had suffered another heart attack.”

Next came Governor Connally on a stretcher, his chest and stomach covered with blood, and we knew immediately he had been shot. Then there was a second stretcher holding a body with the head covered. Mrs. Kennedy was “running alongside the stretcher, holding onto it and crying. We knew then the President had been shot.” Things quieted down, with Rike and McGuire taking their patient to the general desk for admittance. Then they heard a call over the public address system that they were to return to their ambulance immediately. Once Rike and McGuire were outside with their ambulance, a Dallas policeman informed them they might be needed to rush another patient to the hospital. As they waited, they watched Vernon Oneal, funeral home owner, drive up in his hearse. He placed a casket on a gurney, whereby Rike and McGuire accompanied him to the emergency room.

Inside they saw the President’s body covered with a sheet, with a priest giving the last rites. “Then Mrs. Kennedy came in. She looked at us, smiled, and started pulling on her ring finger. After a minute, she went across, lifted the sheet, and put the ring on his finger. She was crying.” After she left, the two ambulance drivers picked up the President’s body and placed it in the casket, closing the lid. On the way out, a priest stopped them to put a cross on the casket and prayed briefly. They loaded the casket on one side of the hearse, while Mrs. Kennedy sat next to it in a pull down seat. “She smiled again and thanked us. She never did break down then.” Secret Service agents then commandeered the hearse and drove it to the Love Airport.

Rike wrote:

“It was hard. We picked up the body, and I kept thinking ‘this is the President.’ The feeling was the same one I get when we have to pick up some little child that has been hurt or killed, or maybe a relative. I never cried, but I had to choke back the tears. Dennis was about the same way. He was quiet anyway, but this time, he did not have anything to say. Now I am sorry I live in Dallas. I was born and raised here, but now I am ashamed.”

On Saturday, the casket containing the slain President was in state in the East Room of the White House, where former U.S. presidents and other American dignitaries and world leaders gathered. The casket then was placed on a bier Sunday afternoon in the Great Rotunda of the Capitol, remaining there until Monday morning when the funeral service began. An AP article provided funeral information, reporting that the President was to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery, at the request of the Kennedy family. Kennedy would be the second U.S. president to be buried there, with the other being President William Howard Taft. A personal friend of President Kennedy’s, Cardinal Richard Cushing of Boston, was to preside at a requiem Mass held at St. Matthew’s Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

**Governor Connally**

An AP reporter filed this report concerning Mr. and Mrs. Connally that was published in the Bee. Governor Connally underwent an hour surgery on Friday, performed by Dr. Robert Shaw at Parkland Hospital. The surgeon told reporters that a bullet struck the Governor in the back, breaking part of rib, coming out his chest, into his wrist, and then embedding in his thigh. Dr. Shaw was...
optimistic, commenting that “his condition was satisfactory and stable. I do not anticipate his getting worse, and he will remain hospitalized for 10 to 14 days.” He expected the Governor to recover completely and would not suffer any disability. He also commented that Connally awoke momentarily, asking about his wife and children.

At 7 a.m. CST, Saturday, Connally was alert and asked his wife Nellie about the President’s condition. She told him he was dead, with him replying, “That’s what I was afraid of.” He asked if the assassin had been found, with her explaining what she knew. Nellie was very tired from the ordeal and had media and visitors kept from her. Family members were with her though: their three children, ages 16, 13, and 10, her four brothers, and the Governor’s sister and mother.

Secret Service agents asked Nellie about the assassination. She remarked that her first recognition of a shooting was when her husband turned to see the President, at which time the Governor toppled to his left on her. She felt that his falling saved him from another bullet. She telephoned the Kennedy family concerning Jackie, expressing her concern and sympathy over the President’s death. Mountains of telegrams were received at the hospital for the Connallys. The Governor had served briefly as the first Secretary of the Navy, being appointed by President Kennedy. He resigned the office when he was elected governor.

An article appeared raising the issue that Oswald may have been aiming at Connally instead of Kennedy. The information causing this suspicion came from the Pentagon’s personnel file on Oswald. Being a Marine, Oswald had written a threatening letter to then Navy Secretary Connally angered that his military discharge was changed from “hardship honorable” to “dishonorable.” He wrote that he would “employ all means” to right that wrong. Oswald had been released from active duty with a “hardship” discharge on September 11, 1959, because his mother had been disabled on the job and lacked financial support. He was to have assisted her with living expenses, but when discharged, he stayed one day with her and left for Russia the next, all preplanned; consequently, he never honored the tenets of the “hardship” discharge.

Oswald’s Background

When in Moscow on October 30, 1959, he asked the American Embassy to revoke his American citizenship. He surrendered his American passport, leaving an official affidavit that read: “I affirm that my allegiance is to the Soviet Socialistic Republic.” He next requested Soviet citizenship from Soviet authorities, declaring to them that “I am a Marxist. Capitalism had passed its peak. I would like to spend the rest of my life here.”

Because of these actions, his discharged was changed to “dishonorable.” In 1961, when he wanted to return to the U.S., this treasonous activity was on his record, angering him, and consequently writing to Navy Secretary Connally in protest. When Oswald heard that a bullet had struck Connally, he was surprised, saying that he was not aware that Connally was present in the limousine. Police Chief Curry commented that he didn’t think Connally was Oswald’s primary target, because being a Marine marksman, and aiming through a telescopic scope, clearly he wanted to assassinate the President.

Arthur Everett of AP penned a brief sketch of Oswald’s life that was printed in the Bee, in which he portrayed the assassin as “a loner,” who kept pretty much to himself. He held radical views, he remarked, but was not a troublemaker. Everett theorized that Oswald’s introverted personality and his interest in reading and thinking attracted him to Marxist philosophy, maybe because of his poverty. Curry remarked that Oswald “readily admitted he was a communist. Apparently he was proud of being a communist. He didn’t try to hide it.” Also, Curry observed he was “cool and defiant, even arrogant at times under questioning. But he can smile easily.”

Everett wrote about Oswald’s early life. He was born in New Orleans on October 17, 1939, and shortly his widowed mother and her three sons moved to Fort Worth. Oswald told interrogators, “My father died before I was born,” a comment of great significance. Oswald’s sixth grade Fort Worth teacher described him as “an introvert, bookish, a loner.” A former classmate recalled that “He was always opposed to any kind of discipline. He seemed to hold it against people up there [school administration], any authority. He never was like any other kid. He didn’t associate hardly at all, but he wasn’t a troublemaker. He talked a good bit in high school about how things should be.” Oswald had an altercation with the high school’s B football coach, shouting, “It’s supposed to be a free country, a man supposed to be able to do what he wants.” Oswald claimed he became interested in Marxism when he was 15, while reading Das Kapitel by Karl Marx.

Everett wrote that when Oswald was just 17, he dropped out of high school and joined the Marines. His service record was tarnished, having received two court-martials, once for possessing a civilian handgun. He served as radar operator in Japan, reaching only the rank of Private First Class. Allen G Gray of Buffalo, NY, had served with him in the Marines, classifying him as “a lonely, introverted, aloof boy. He was bitter about the tough time his mother had during the Depression.”

Everett continued. After spending just nine months in the Soviet Union, Oswald wrote a letter to U.S. Senator John Tower, a Texas Republican, begging the Senator to help him. He told Tower that the Soviets wouldn’t grant him an exit visa to return to the U.S., even though he was an American citizen. Oswald was greatly disappointed with the Soviet Union. He asked the Senator to “raise the question of holding by the Soviet Union a citizen of the U.S. against his will and expressed desire.” Tower’s office pursued the matter, finding that Oswald was still an American citizen, not a Soviet citizen. After a number of months, he was provided with a new passport and a customary travel loan of $435 to return to the U.S. In the meantime, Oswald had married a Russian woman, Marina Nicholaevna, who worked at a Minsk hospital as a pharmacist technician.

When he returned with Marina in January 1962, he continued his Marxist activities in the U.S. He was connected with a pro-Castro organization in New Orleans, where he distributed pro-Castro literature on the street. He was accosted by anti-Castro Cubans, ending in a skirmish and arrest. He was released and invited to debate anti-Castro Cubans at a New Orleans radio station. Being pro-Castro supporter and a vocal one at that was very dangerous business in the Louisiana city. Because of this, he was suspected to be a CIA or FBI plant to infiltrate pro-Castro organizations.
Football Response

It was football season in America. The President had been a major sport enthusiast, having been an athlete at times himself. Walter Byers, who was the Executive Director of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), remarked that “President Kennedy contributed to the advancement of America in uncounted ways. We shall remain forever conscious of the new meaning and significance he gave to the importance of maintaining a sound body as a base for an alert mind.” Avery Brundage, President of the International Olympic Committee, commented, “President Kennedy believed in the Olympic principle of physical training and competitive sport for all with the idea of developing stronger and healthier boys and girls and making better citizens.”

The Kennedy family was known to play touch football at holiday gatherings. Jack and his brother Bobby were known to play catch with a football on the Capitol grounds when the President was a senator. Jack had been a freshman football player at Harvard University. Because of the President’s death, the 80th Harvard-Yale game was postponed for Saturday, November 23rd. It was reported in newspapers that nearly all college football games across the nation followed suit. The American Football League canceled its games for Sunday, November 24th, but the National Football League (NFL) didn’t. Pete Rozelle, NFL Commissioner, commented on Sunday that “I did not feel it was disrespectful to the memory of our late President that the games were played. . . . Football was Mr. Kennedy’s game.” San Francisco Forty-Niner’s tackle Bob St. Clair remarked, “I cried when I heard Mr. Kennedy had been killed. I really didn’t want to play.” Washington Redskins’ Coach Bill McPeek told reporters that the team will send the game ball to the White House “as a symbol of the deep feeling the Washington players felt for the late President Kennedy.”

Ford Frick, Commissioner of Major League Baseball (MLB), expressed that “We feel a deep loss and at the same time a great sense of shame and unhappiness that this should happen in our country.” President of the MLB’s American League, Joe Cronin, declared “He surely was one of the greatest sports enthusiasts ever to live in the White House. He knew a lot about sports, things you wouldn’t expect, and he enjoyed swapping sports stories.”

Communists

From Moscow, AP reported that Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev returned to Moscow from an engagement to pay his condolences at the American Embassy. He visited the Embassy with Mrs. Khrushchev and Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko. Khrushchev signed a book of remembrance that was near Kennedy’s picture. He and Mrs. Khrushchev spoke for 15 minutes with American Ambassador Foy D. Kohler. There were tear in Mrs. Khrushchev’s eyes when she exited the visit. Mr. and Mrs. Khrushchev sent a telegram of condolences to Mrs. Kennedy, while Khrushchev and Gromyko telegrammed President Johnson. Khrushchev remarked that the assassination was “heinous and a heavy blow to those who cherished peace and U.S.-U.S.S.R. cooperation.” He furthered remarked that President Kennedy was:

“A person of broad outlook, who realistically assessed the situation and tried to find ways for negotiated settlement of the international problems which now divide the world. The Soviet Government and the Soviet people share the deep grief of the American people over the great loss and express the hope that the search for setting the disputable issues, a search to which President J.F. Kennedy made a tangible contribution, would be continued in the interests of peace, for the benefit of mankind.”

Official remarks from the Soviet Union were broadcast over Moscow Radio, charging right wing elements in the U.S. with the assassination. It implied that the Dallas Police was part of it. It remarked that “the head of the Dallas Police said that Oswald allegedly admitted that he was a member of the Communist Party, but the more details and announcements are made the more suspicious and dark this case appears.” Moscow Radio claimed that Oswald was interrogated for ten hours and charged with Kennedy’s slaying, “but there was no evidence which could prove this accusation. The police are trying to involve the Communist Party of the United States (CPUS) in the assassination.”

Officials of the CPUS declared emphatically that Oswald had no connection with their organization. A CPUS spokesman proclaimed that “we want to reiterate our complete condemnation of the dastardly assassination of President John F. Kennedy as a monstrous crime against the country.”

Then came a special message from Cuban Premier Fidel Castro on Havana Television and Radio, in which he remarked that Kennedy’s death was of “grave and bad news” for Cuba. He declared Cuba may face “an even worse policy” from the U.S.,” possibly a new U.S. supported invasion under President Johnson. Castro had berated and verbally attacked Kennedy, even before the 1960 presidential election. Castro commented that the assassination “has no justification. We must analyze it carefully.” Other concerns were voiced internationally about President Johnson’s direction. Peking (Beijing) Radio and Communist China’s newspaper People’s Daily accused Johnson of “issuing his first foreign policy directive calling for intensified efforts for aggression in South Viet Nam.”

American UN Ambassador Adlai E. Stevenson was in Washington, D.C., having lunch with Soviet Ambassador Nikolai T. Fedorenko and Latin American diplomats when he learned of the assassination. He immediately returned to UN headquarters in New York City, waiting for instructions on what he needed to do. He issued this statement:

“The tragedy of this day is beyond comprehension. All of us who knew him will bear the grief of his death to the day of ours. And all men everywhere who love peace and justice and freedom will bow their heads. At such a moment we can only turn to prayer – prayer to comfort our grief, to sustain Mrs. Kennedy and his family, to strengthen President Lyndon Johnson and to guide us in time to come. May God help us.”

More Condolences

UN Secretary General U Thant canceled all UN business until Tuesday. He sent a message to Mrs. Kennedy that read in part: “Your husband’s courage and noble human qualities will surely be a source of strength to you in the years ahead.” From Japan
came condolences from Hohei Hanami, Mayor of Shiokawa, who sent a telegram to the Kennedy family stating, “The world has lost an irreplaceable man, for there is no other president who worked for peace like he did.” Hanami was the 34 year-old Japanese Navy Commander, who rammed his destroyer into 26 year-old Lieutenant Jack Kennedy’s PT 109 in August 1942 off the Solomon Islands.

**Kennedy Patriarch**

One final member of the Kennedy family needed to be told of the President’s assassination. On Sunday, November 24th, Edward “Ted” M. Kennedy, U.S. Senator, 31, approached his father Joseph P. Kennedy, 75, telling him about his son Jack’s death. With Ted were his mother Rose, 73, and his sister, Eunice Shriver, 42. The former American Ambassador to Great Britain, Joe Kennedy, had a stroke two years earlier, causing him to be severely disabled and wheelchair bound. It was said he took the news well. Joe and Rose Kennedy had previously lost their oldest son, Joe, Jr., who was killed in 1944 while piloting a bomber over France during World War II and their second oldest daughter Kathleen, who was killed in an airplane crash in France in 1948. Former Ambassador Kennedy had enormous political ability and connections, crucial to his son’s election as President. Jack last visited his father a month before his assassination. As he about to depart on the presidential helicopter from Hyannis Port, he turned to his aide, David Powers, with tears in his eyes, saying, “He’s the one who made all this possible and look at him now.”

**More Evidence**

It was reported in the newspaper that District Attorney Wade had secured more evidence on Oswald, making the case against him nearly foolproof. Wade had in hand a Dallas city map found in Oswald’s room that marked his line of fire to kill the President. It was the spot where the assassination took place. Wade commented that “I have sent men to the electric chair with less evidence.” The District Attorney had the rifle, fingerprints, witnesses, and other convicting evidence.

A newspaper report revealed that two months before the assassination, September 1963, Oswald visited Cuban and Soviet embassies in Mexico City requesting visas. This disturbing news caused an array of questions, such as, “Was Oswald heading towards Cuba or the Soviet Union after the assassination?” “Was Cuba or the Soviet Union linked to the assassination?”

**Oswald’s End**

It was concluded by Dallas Police that after two days of intensive questioning, Oswald would not confess murdering the President or Tippit. Oswald had insisted from the outset: “I did not kill President Kennedy. I did not kill anyone.” It was time to transfer him from a jail of limited security to a maximum security cell at the county jail, a mile distant. The plan was to have Oswald board an armored car in the police station’s underground garage. The vehicle would then have a heavy police escort to the county jail.

The transfer was scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Sunday, November 24th, but Oswald’s final interrogation ran 45 minutes longer. Oswald was escorted through the basement door at 11:15 a.m. by Police Chief Curry. They headed towards the armored car, when out of the shadows stepped Jack Ruby who point blank shot Oswald with his snubbed nose handgun in Oswald’s left side. Newspaper accounts reported that Oswald dropped in his tracks, with “a single cry of anguish escaping from his lips.” Police quickly overwhelmed Ruby, arresting him. Oswald was rushed to Parkland Hospital, being fatally wounded. It all happened so quickly, catching everyone by surprise, including millions watching on television. Someone was heard to yell in the underground garage, “It’s too good for him (Oswald)!” There had been a crowd of over 200 gathered at the time there, primarily police and newsmen.

In the emergency room at the hospital, doctors discovered the bullet had torn through Oswald’s vital internal organs, missing his heart, but destroying everything in its path. He never regained consciousness, dying in the emergency room where the President had died two days earlier. Some of the same doctors who treated Kennedy also desperately tried to save Oswald’s life. Secret Service agents transported his body to a Fort Worth funeral home, and then on the following day, Monday, Oswald was buried at Fort Worth’s Rose Hill Cemetery, with a simple service.

Newspapers reported that Jack Ruby, 52, owned a Dallas strip club, the Carousel Club. He declared to Dallas Police that he killed Oswald so Jackie would not have the agony of testifying at Oswald’s trial. Ruby’s past was shady, being a street brawler, smalltime gambler, bouncer, and a hustler, promoting anything for a buck. He was well-known by Dallas Police and moved easily around at the police station. He was known to freely present his business card to whomever he greeted, which read “I’m Jack Ruby – Carousel.” On Saturday, he was present at the police station, standing among reporters, handing his card to Justice of the Peace David L. Johnston and District Attorney Wade. Ruby liked policemen and reporters, frequently wanting to be at crime scenes. Some of the Dallas policemen were routine visitors at his establishment, where he showered them with drinks. His police record noted that he had a short temper and carried a handgun. On Sunday morning, he walked from the Western Union office that was nearby and simply strolled down the ramp to the police station’s underground garage, catching Oswald by accident just at the moment he exited the jail’s door, shooting him in stride.

Ruby was born on March 25, 1911 in Chicago to orthodox Jewish immigrants. His given name was Jacob Leon Rubenstein, but he changed his name to Jack Ruby when he came to Dallas in 1947. He and his brothers operated a mail order business in Dallas, and it was thought their names needed to sound less...
Jewish to attract more customers. Ruby was husky, dressed conservatively with snap brim fedoras that he thought gave him class. He never married but shared his apartment with an employee from his strip joint, George Senator, and their four dogs. Senator and Ruby’s sister said that Ruby “was more upset over Kennedy’s death than that of our father.” After Kennedy’s assassination, he kept saying to them “that poor woman and those kids.” Ruby was the fifth of eight children and spent time in foster homes and juvenile hall. He had earlier connections with Teamsters and mobsters, especially in horse race wagering. Ruby was a World War II veteran, having served in the Army Air Force, 1943-46, as an aircraft mechanic at U.S. bases.

Ruby’s lawyers announced that he would plead “temporary insanity,” since he was emotionally disturbed at the time he shot Oswald. Attorney District Wade declared he would seek the death penalty for Ruby. The American public was divided on the shooting of Oswald. Some felt he received what he deserved, while others were angered because he should have had his day in court. Even so, the fact was Oswald died with his lips sealed about the assassination and now the full truth would never be known. Ruby’s murderous actions threw the President’s assassination into conspiracy chaos. Was there a connection between Oswald and Ruby, and who else?

Communist propaganda called Oswald’s murder a cover-up by right wing forces. From the first, Moscow bitterly resented the linking of Oswald with communism. The Soviets claimed he was nothing more than a self-proclaimed American Marxist, who found USSR unsuitable to his accustomed capitalist living. Andrei Gromyko, Soviet Foreign Minister, before flying back to Moscow, said, “We do not know him.” Pravda, the communist newspaper in Moscow, declared “Everyone in America knows that the most reactionary, the wildest elements, have built their nests precisely in Texas and Oswald’s killing proved that.” It also claimed that Oswald’s murder “was a premeditated action of fascist minded forces, the ultra right wing and racist circles that are plotting against the American code of justice.” Some though applauded Ruby’s actions, claiming “the deed was some type of justice.” A woman in Albany telephoned a newspaper office, declaring Ruby should “be given the Congressional Medal of Honor.” Taxi driver, Carl Moore was quoted as saying, “Good. It was justified. The man who did it was a nut. But he [Oswald] got what he deserved.” Oswald’s killing was labeled by many “the murder that mirrored a breakdown in the moral standards of the nation.”

Holton wrote that clergymen condemned the act as a “serious breach in Christian ethics.” Still others claimed Oswald’s death was “a practical loss.” The Rev. Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, President of the Lutheran Church in America and Chairman of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches commented, “Life, as a gift of God, deserves to be respected far more than it is, and self-control ought to be restored to its rightful standing.” Even so, newsman Holton remarked that “Most wondered whether the world would ever know if the true presidential assassin had paid for his crime.” Crank calls were received by Dallas Police and various prominent Dallas residents. There was a threat against Federal Judge Hughes who swore in Johnson as President. There were calls that bombs were placed in Dallas Mayor Cabell’s airplane that was to carry him to Kennedy’s funeral. Bomb threats were received at the offices of the Dallas Morning News, the Church of Good Shepard, and Ruby’s attorneys.

**Honoring a Slain President**

Meanwhile in Washington, D.C., the funeral procession began, taking the slain President’s body from the White House to lie in state on a bier under the Great Rotunda of the Capitol. An AP article described the solemn journey to the Capitol:

“The mournful beat of muffled drums. Ahead of the caisson bearing the casket marched an honor guard composed of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the commandants of the Marine Corps and Coast Guard, clergymen of three major faiths, and a company of Navy enlisted men, who marched in memory of the young Navy Lieutenant and war hero, who became their Commander-in-Chief. There was the slow clip-clop of the horse caisson moving down Pennsylvania Avenue, down an avenue of stifled sobs and open tears (the same caisson that bore the body of President Franklin Roosevelt just 18 years before). A crowd of 300,000 packed tightly along the avenue, with doffed caps and heads bowed as the six white horses pulled...
the black draped caisson, being led by a seventh, down the mile long route. Just behind pranced the riderless horse, a symbol of the slain warrior, with its pair of empty cavalry boots reversed in the stirrups and a saber in a silver scabbard swinging from its saddle. Led by a military man, the dark bay horse was Mrs. Kennedy’s horse Sardar. Next came a single sailor carrying the personal flag of the President, then Mrs. Kennedy and the children riding in a limousine with President and Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. As the casket was carried up the broad Capitol steps, there was a distant 21-gun salute and the slow strains of a service band playing “Hail to the Chief.” John F. Kennedy’s final ascent up the broad Capitol steps he had once climbed as a young congressman and senator and then as the youngest man ever elected president. Erect and staring straight ahead, Mrs. Kennedy followed the casket up the steps, leading her children by the hand.

Inside, three government leaders eulogized the slain President: Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield, Chief Justice Earl Warren, and House Speaker John McCormack. The exclusive audience included the Kennedy family, national and world leaders, and other important dignitaries. Of the three eulogies, it was 72 year-old Chief Justice Warren’s words that rang in great magnitude throughout the mammoth rotunda. He sternly declared, “What a price we pay for this fanaticism! We know that such acts are commonly stimulated by forces of hatred and malevolence. If we really love this country, if we truly love justice and mercy, if we fervently want to make this nation better for those who are to follow us, we can at least restrain the hatred that consumes people, the false accusations that divide us, and the bitterness that begets violence.” Senator Mansfield, trying to control his trembling voice, told those gathered, “A piece of each of us died with him. He gave that we might give of ourselves, that we might give to one another until there would be no room, no room at all, for the bigotry, the hatred, the prejudice, and the arrogance which converged in that moment of horror to strike him down.” Congressman McCormack, a Bostonian, spoke tenderly of Kennedy, remarking that he was “a strong and courageous man.”

The crowd outside listened to the eulogies over a public address system and began forming a line to view the casket. The article observed: “All through the cold, bitter night people came to the Capitol. With slow steps and solemn faces an estimated 250,000 mourners filed past the bier. Some crossed themselves as they walked by, some dabbed at their eyes with sodden handkerchiefs, most stared with long unwavering gazes, their faces soft, their eyes sad.” The line of people stretched for 30 blocks, most waiting eight to nine hours to pay their respects to the President. Police Sergeant Robert B. Wissman, who was supervising the waiting line, commented, “Even when you tell them how long it will take to get in, they don’t go away.”

Marine Lt. Thomas Dempsey waited for seven hours, saying “It is an honor to be able to see the President.” Maria Falcon, 16, who was born in Italy, waited eight hours, saying “I liked the president. This was the least I could do.” An Army Green Beret officer, waited seven hours, saying “There’s nothing else a citizen can do now except this.” A female Washington office worker fought back tears saying, “I just don’t believe that he’s gone. I feel like something went out of me.” An African-American boy dressed in his Boy Scout’s uniform shivered with his mother in the cold, both in great sadness. Many brought bouquets of flowers that were handed to the soldiers at the rotunda entrance. Honor guards at the coffin were changed every 30 minutes in a slow stately walk. The article concluded: “During the evening when a member of the Kennedy family came, or some national or international dignitary, there were no murmurs from the throng. They were not curious. They were not disrespectful. They were mourners. And they still came.”

On Monday, November 25th, President Kennedy was buried in Arlington National Cemetery on a grassy hillside, where the nation’s heroes were buried. There was 21-gun salute, three volleys fired by military men, and a bugler sounded taps that echoed across the slopes of the vast sacred cemetery. John, Jr., turned three that day, with Caroline’s sixth birthday coming in two days. Present throughout the two-day funeral was the greatest array of kings, presidents, princes, and ministers ever assembled. There were 26 heads of state and a representation from 53 nations, even delegates from Iron Curtain nations of Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia, with whom the U.S. did not maintain diplomatic relations, were there. There was a sense of the reality to those present concerning the risks political leaders take. There were 250 specially assigned State Department and Army security agents to protect the distinguished foreign visitors throughout their stay.

Throughout it all, television cameras panned the scenes like no other occurrence before, while commentators addressed the nation minute-by-minute as events unfolded. Without question, all eyes were upon the First Lady, Mrs. Kennedy, watching her gracefully bear the heavy burden of the nation, with firm composure, demonstrating to the world a person of great courage, dignity, civility, and refinement, which made American hearts across the land swell up in national pride. “She belongs to us,” they nodded silently as they witnessed the solemn spectacle before their eyes.

Around the world, various nations, their governments and people, mourned the American President and demonstrated their sorrow in various ways. Only Communist China remained silent, except for their normal haranguing of U.S. foreign policy. In Japan,
Prince Akihito and Crown Princess Michiko attended memorial services at Tokyo’s St. Ignatius Church, while the Japanese flag was flown at half-staff over all government buildings. At U.S. bases throughout Japan, guns roared with final salutes for the President. Over 50,000 U.S. servicemen and dependents attended various services, as well as in South Korea, where another 50,000 U.S. servicemen joined together at various churches and gatherings to honor their fallen President. On the island of Formosa, 10,000 Americans attended religious services honoring President Kennedy, while thousands of Nationalist Chinese joined in, with the Nationalist Chinese flags flying at half-staff on Taiwan.

Indian Prime Minister Nehru attended a memorial service at the American Embassy in New Delhi, and then he delivered a eulogy before the Indian Parliament. Italy continued to fly the Italian flag at half-staff for a third day, and unions throughout the nation, had work stoppages of five minutes to pay respect to Kennedy. In Poland, flags were at half-staff on all government buildings, with only appropriate entertainment and media programming allowed out of respect for the American President. In West Berlin, citizens continued to flock to the U.S. Embassy, signing books of condolence at the City Hall. City Hall Square was officially renamed John F. Kennedy Platz in a solemn ceremony. American Commandant Major General James H. Polk assured the West Berlin crowd that President Lyndon Johnson would stand just as firmly in support of West Berlin as President Kennedy.

South Vietnam

UPI reported that a telegram was sent to Jackie from South Vietnam’s Mme. Ngo Dinh Nhu. Her husband and his brother, President Ngo Dinh Diem, were assassinated just 20 days before Kennedy’s assassination. Because of the Kennedy administration’s involvement in South Vietnam and indications that there may have been some connection with the Kennedy administration and the bloody coup, her remarks were carefully chosen. Mme. Nhu wrote:

“Though not having the pleasure to know you or hearing from you personally I wish to tell you of my profound sympathy for you and your little ones in your time of shock and grief. . . . If as reported, President Kennedy’s assassination did come from communist hands. Indeed, such a murder where even the wounds inflicted on President Kennedy were identical to those of President Ngo Dinh Diem, and of my husband, and coming only 20 days after the Vietnamese tragedy would only prove to the world that even power or extreme graciousness with communism still does not protect from its traitorous blows.”

Two Other Funerals

Three hours after President Kennedy was given a hero’s burial at Arlington, a very different funeral took place at Rose Hill Cemetery, Fort Worth. Preston McGraw of UPI reported on Oswald’s funeral. He wrote that there was a plain pine coffin covered with a gray cloth. Newsmen served as pall bearers, because there were no others available, and Rev. Louis Saunders, Executive Secretary of the Fort Worth Council of Churches, provided a graveside prayer. The lid to the coffin was lifted, with Oswald’s wife Marina and his mother Marguerite bending and quickly kissing him. His brother was there and also Oswald’s two tiny young children. Others present to witness the occasion were Secret Service agents and policemen, while the public was not admitted. Red oak trees and hackberry bushes were prevalent on the grounds, with the grass a wilted brown, being burned by the drought. The cemetery’s flag was flying at half-staff, and below the cemetery was the blue water of Arlington Lake. There were police guards, guard dogs, and patrolling police cars serving as sentries throughout the day and night to ward against vandalizing.

The next day, Tuesday, November 26th, was Tippitt’s funeral. Four hundred sat inside a small Baptist church honoring the policeman that Oswald killed on November 22nd. There were over 1,000 outside the church, standing silently in respect for a fallen comrade. There were policemen from near and far, wearing their sharply creased uniforms and medals. Police Chief Curry remarked to the assembly that Officer Tippit “was an ideal police officer, a man of very fine morals.” Present were his widow and their three small children. Fifteen motorcycle policemen escorted the hearse carrying Tippit’s body for burial at a Dallas cemetery.

American Violence

Now that the horrendous events had passed, it was now the time for the letter writers, columnists, and editors to fashion their thoughts, analysis, and philosophy for newspaper readers to digest. One of the first editorials written was by AP’s James Marlow in Washington, D.C. He wrote: “A president and a policeman were shot to death and a governor wounded in Dallas, and the man charged with the crimes in turn murdered, before he got a fair trial, by a gunman who leaped through the police lines to shoot him. These crimes are a product of the American society where violence and talk of violence increase as state officials defy federal court orders until troops are called out to stop them [civil rights protests].” Marlow quoted part of Chief Justice Warren’s eulogy: “We do know that such acts are commonly stimulated by forces of hatred and malevolence such as today are eating their way into the bloodstream of American life. What a price to pay for fanaticism.”

The day after Kennedy’s funeral, former Vice President Richard M. Nixon asked Americans to “pledge themselves to fight this tendency of hatred and violence we’ve seen in the last few days. We cannot help but deplore a man taking the law into his own hands.” Adlai Stevenson remarked when accosted in Dallas a month before, “It’s all right to have your own views but don’t hit anyone.” Dr. A. Raymond Grant, a Methodist bishop in Oregon, commented, “I shuddered when I learned that crowds cheered when Lee Oswald had been killed. God have mercy upon us, that human life has become so cheap and that tragedy has been heaped upon tragedy.”

Marlow wrote that assassinations and assassination attempts weren’t new in U.S. history. Four presidents were assassinated (Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, and Kennedy), while four other presidents were nearly assassinated (Andrew Jackson, Teddy Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and Truman). Over that same 100 years, not one British Prime Minister had been assassinated, because of the country’s restrictive gun laws. Marlow remarked that because America was a frontier nation, guns became a staple of life. (Since Marlow wrote his article, there were attempted assassinations of Ford and Reagan.)
President Johnson Leads

Johnson at first was understandably overwhelmed by the assassination, but quickly his instincts kicked in. He knew it was his job as President to rally the nation from its despair. His first presidential order came after being sworn into office: “Now let’s get airborne.” His first public statement in Washington, D.C. was a promise “to do my best. That’s all I can do.” He appealed to Americans for “your help and God’s.” Johnson telephoned Rose Kennedy and Nellie Connally while aboard Air Force One. As soon as they arrived at the capitol, the President met with Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara and Republican Senate Leader Everett M. Dirksen. Undersecretary of State George W. Ball rode with Johnson aboard the presidential helicopter to the White House. They were joined by Presidential Assistant McGeorge Bundy upon arrival.

President Johnson formed a base of operations in the executive offices adjoining the White House. He began his presidential duties, by first meeting with a few congressional leaders and then telephoning former Presidents Truman and Eisenhower. He discussed the President’s funeral arrangements with Kennedy’s brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver. He conferred with J. Edgar Hoover about the assassination. He requested all White House staff members and President Kennedy’s Cabinet to remain in service. He did all of this before going to his residence in Spring Valley section of Washington, D.C. late in the day. And to think, he was supposed to be at LBJ Ranch, playing host to President Kennedy and Jackie.

The next morning, Saturday, November 23rd, President Johnson met in his temporary office with Attorney General Robert “Bobby” Kennedy at 8:45 a.m. Bundy escorted the new President to the White House “Situation Room,” which was the headquarters for international security. Johnson then spoke with CIA Director John A. McCone, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, McNamara, Bundy, and congressional leaders at various times. He lunched with Former President Eisenhower and then was briefed on world affairs, followed by his first Cabinet meeting.

President Johnson proclaimed Monday, November 25th to be a national day of mourning. He attended church services on Saturday, and paid his respects to his fallen predecessor, President Kennedy, whose casket was in state at the White House. He then conferred with FBI’s Hoover, CIO Labor Union President George Meany, and Frederick Kappel, who was the President of American Telephone and Telegraph and also the President of the Business Council. He asked Meany and Kappel for their support in labor and business matters.

Johnson telephoned Policeman Tippit’s wife to offer her condolences and assistance. He met with the Director of the President’s Committee on Equal Opportunity in Housing, Pennsylvania Governor David Lawrence. He spoke with Agriculture Secretary Orville L. Freeman and Labor Secretary W. Willard Wirtz. He conferred with Sargent Shriver once again concerning funeral plans for President Kennedy. He then made arrangements to speak to a joint session of Congress on Wednesday, November 27th. There was a stream of visitors throughout the day, so much so that the elevator stopped working. The next day, Sunday, November 24th, was busier with Johnson attending church services and being present in the procession transporting President Kennedy’s casket from the White House to the Capitol to rest in state in the Great Rotunda. He didn’t return home to Spring Valley until well after 7 p.m.

It could be seen immediately that President Johnson was very different from President Kennedy. They both were energetic, capable, and very intelligent, but Johnson lacked the sophistication, wit, and intellectualism of Kennedy. Johnson though was a natural Chief Executive. He was demanding, forceful, tough, and persuasive. He could manipulate, forge agreements, and work compromises to get government rolling and make it effective. He sought the presidency in 1960, but Kennedy edged him out of the Democratic nomination. He agreed bitterly to be on the ticket as Vice President, because he was a loyal Democrat and a patriotic American. The selection of a Vice President may be one of the most important political decisions made by a presidential nominee. It is believed that Kennedy chose Johnson, because he knew Johnson possessed presidential abilities. And also, because the Texan had tremendous political competence, congressional experience, and was a southerner to balance the party’s ticket.

Those with conspiracy in mind concocted a theory that Johnson, FBI, and CIA had Kennedy assassinated, because of his softness with communists and foreign policy of détente with the Soviet Union. That softness certainly was not apparent in Kennedy’s handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Even so, it is unconceivable that Johnson would have such evil aims as treason and murder. Sure, the Kennedy Democrats and the Johnson Democrats were party foes, but it is difficult to imagine that such animosity would lead to the killing of a President. President Johnson was hardly that type. Tough and ornery Texan, he was, but he also loved humanity and treated others respectfully and with regard.

Since the nation didn’t have a Vice President, who was next in line should Johnson die? After all, Johnson did have heart problems. The 1945 Act of Secession placed the House Speaker as the next President. In 1963, he was John W. McCormack, 72, a Massachusetts Democrat. Next would be the Senate President Pro Tempore, who was Senator Carl Hayden, 86, an Arizona Democrat. President Johnson was 55 at the time, while President Kennedy
had been 46.

Jack Bell of AP reported that National Republican Committee Chairman William F. Miller announced there would be total suspension of partisan political activity during the month of mourning for President Kennedy. New York Republican Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller and U.S. Republican Senator Barry M. Goldwater of Arizona planned “no political speeches for a month.” Goldwater further declared that “We want to see what President Johnson will do. It would not be fair for the opposing party to heckle him while he is getting organized in his new job.”

On Tuesday, November 26th, President Johnson conferred with Anastas Mikoyan, Krushchhev’s top aide, for nearly an hour, telling the press afterwards that he and Mikoyan “had a pleasant conversation, in which we touched upon matters of mutual interest.” Johnson remarked to Mikoyan that he would like to meet with the Soviet Premier to specifically discuss issues of “common concern.” The relationship between President Kennedy and Krushchev had grown more cordial, once the Soviet Premier found that the young President could be tough. On November 26th, UN Secretary General Thant paid tribute to President Kennedy at the General Assembly where diplomats from 111 nations gathered. He declared, “Let us resolve that President Kennedy did not live or die in vain. Let us call a truce to terror. Let us invoke the blessings of peace.”

On November 26th, the stock market rebounded with heavy trading, becoming one of the biggest rallies in its history. The U.S. economy was sound, and the majority of Americans are not prone to panic. But such confidence can be fragile, especially when consumer behavior and the business world can be difficult to measure and govern. It was believed if Johnson’s administrative policies remained the same as Kennedy’s, which was probable, then the dollar would remain strong in the world economy.

It was time for the big guns in the editorial world to spin their analysis. On November 27th, Drew Pearson’s “Washington Merry-Go-Round” appeared in the Turlock Journal, entitled “Some Problems Facing LBJ.” Pearson first traced American-Soviet relations since World War II, noting the coldness. President Kennedy, Pearson remarked, was making strides in warming that relationship, but President Johnson, though a champion in domestic issues, had “a slight Texas chip on his shoulder when it came to foreign affairs.” Johnson had served on the Senate’s Armed Services Committee and was close to American military leaders. However, he disagreed with some of Kennedy’s foreign policy decisions and the opinions of State Secretary Rusk.

Pearson remarked that Johnson had already fired Kennedy’s speech writer, former Harvard Professor Dr. Arthur Schlesinger, for differing with him concerning his November 27th address to joint session of Congress. Schlesinger felt that the new President should emphasize issues of hate and intolerance, while Johnson wanted to stress his support for Kennedy’s programs. President Johnson had already replaced Kennedy’s appointment secretary with his own, Walter Jenkins, who assisted in writing past Johnson speeches, especially those on civil rights.

A Different Thanksgiving Holiday

Thursday, November 28th was Thanksgiving Day. President Kennedy had written a Thanksgiving message to the nation, which President Johnson asked all churches across the U.S. to read during their worship services. In the message, Kennedy noted America’s prosperity, for which “we give our humble thanks.” He gave thanks for our inheritance of “decency of purpose, steadfastness of resolve, and strength of will.” He asked for courage, humility, and continued guidance from God and to “sustain us in the great unfinished tasks of achieving peace, justice, and understanding among all men and all nations and of ending misery and suffering wherever they exist.”

A Thanksgiving Day editorial in the Bee noted the words of Job: “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” The editor wrote that there would be heavy hearts at Thanksgiving tables, because “Our President’s death created an empty place at every dinner.” The writer remarked that nowhere else would the President’s absent be felt more than at Hyannis Port, where the Kennedy family gathered for Thanksgiving. It was to have been an especially happy holiday, with birthdays of Caroline and John, Jr. being celebrated.

On Wednesday, November 27th, President Johnson appeared before a joint session of Congress. His address was directed towards congressional support of Kennedy’s programs, especially civil rights legislation. He declared, “The ideas and ideals of John F. Kennedy must and will be translated into effective action. Let us here highly resolve that John Fitzgerald Kennedy did not live or die in vain.” Johnson asked for “an end to the teaching and preaching of hate, evil, and violence.” He called for early congressional action to enact an $11 billion tax cut that President Kennedy strongly supported. He exclaimed that “No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy’s memory than the earliest possible passage of the Civil Rights Bill for which he fought.”

He told the overflowing chambers that “I would have given gladly all I have not to be standing here today” as your President. He called the assassination “the foulest deed of our time!” He exclaimed, “The time has come for Americans of all races, creeds, and political beliefs to understand and respect one another. Let us turn away from fanatics of the far left and the far right, from the apostles of bitterness and bigotry, from those defiant of law, and those who pour venom into our nation’s bloodstream.”

Renowned critic and columnist Walter Lippmann’s Thanksgiving editorial in the Bee registered concerns about violence in America’s future. He declared:

“America’s first job after the ‘unspeakable crime’ of the President’s assassination must be to come to grips with an internal crisis within U.S. and fix it. America’s future depends on it and our capacity to govern ourselves. What we have to realize is that though speech and gossip and rumor are free, the safety of the republic is at stake when extremists go unrestrained. Extremists may profess any ideology, but what they all have in common is that they treat opponents as enemies, as outside the laws and the community of their fellow men.”

Lippmann remarked that Dallas had a strain of political violence there, as evidenced by the harsh methods used by right wing demonstrators on visitors such as Connally, Johnson, and Stevenson. He wrote:
“In this atmosphere of political violence lived the President’s murderer, himself addicted to the fascination of violence in his futile, lonely, and brooding existence. The salient fact about him was his alienation from humanity, from country, family and friends. Nothing within him, it would seem bound him to the President or to the Governor as human beings. No human feeling stayed his hand. In his alienation, Lee Oswald turned to the left. The common characteristic of an extremist is their alienation, the loss of ties and separation from their community. An extremist is an outsider. For him the government in Washington is a hated foreign power, and the President in Washington is an invading conqueror. There is no limit to his hatred, which feeds upon the venom of malice, slander, and hallucination.”

Lippmann noted that Mayor Cabell asked Dallas citizens to be “in prayerful reflection, search your heart and determine if through intemperate word or deed we might have contributed in some fashion to the movement of this [Oswald’s] mind across the brink of insanity.” But throughout America, Lippmann wrote, were “divisive forces of hatred and ungovernability that are strong among us, and the habit of intemperate speech and thought has become deeply ingrained. It is deepened by the strains of war and the frustrations of this revolutionary age, by the exploitations of violence and cruelty in the mass media, by the profusion of weapons and the presence of so many who know how to use them.”

European Thought

The Turlock Journal published a UPI article on November 27th from London that reveals the thinking of journalists in Europe, concerning President Kennedy’s assassination and Oswald’s murder. Nearly every European journalist declared there was a conspiracy and laid much of the blame for the murders on the demeanor of Dallas Police. The Soviet government newspaper Izvestia blamed ultra-conservatives and also the “American system.” In Lisbon, Portuguese newspaper Diario de Lisboa claimed it was American gangster movies that graphically illustrated such bloody attacks.

London’s Daily Sketch warned that the result of these slayings may be another American Civil War, “a disaster of unparalleled magnitude for the West.” The newspaper reasoned that Oswald knew of U.S. government plots to kill his hero Fidel Castro, which caused him to assassinate President Kennedy. Both French and Italian newspapers speculated that there were accomplices in the shootings. Paris newspaper Liberation pointed the finger at Dallas Police for conspiracy. It claimed Kennedy was killed by a plot, and Oswald was silenced by gangsters through Ruby.

Milan’s Courriere Lombardo remarked that the surplus Italian Army rifle was old and could not have been fired in such rapid succession, stating that “Oswald did not fire alone.” Paris Journal agreed with the Courriere, claiming that “either the rifle was not the murder weapon or there was someone with Oswald, perhaps more than one.”

The West German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine blamed the killings on one incredible blunder after another, being an “accumulation of failures.” Switzerland’s Neue Zuercher Zeitung claimed American media was responsible for Oswald’s death. A Swiss newspaper remarked, “In glaring contrast to reason and public interest, the media of mass communications cried for unrestricted publicity, which apparently led the Dallas police into temptation.”

Firebrand Walker

Former Major General Edwin A. Walker commented to the right wing German weekly, Zeitung and Soldaten Zeitung, that Kennedy was shot by leftists. He declared that Oswald was a Marxist and “one of the huge mass of leftist infiltrators who struck.” Walker had been removed from the Army by Kennedy, because of his outspoken right wing comments. Walker claimed that “Kennedy’s policies were American policies, rich in failures and never crowned by success.” Walker called the assassination a “tragic death,” but it “proves dramatically that the danger that surrounds us must not be underestimated.” Walker was nearly murdered by Oswald on April 11, 1963 as he sat at his residential desk in Dallas. This was confirmed by his wife Marina’s testimony and evidence found where Oswald lived. He fired from the alley at night just missing Walker.

Threats, a Movie, Jackie Responds

AP released a story on November 27th, published in the Bee that FBI Special Agent J. Gordon Shanklin received an anonymous phone call at 2 a.m. November 24th, with the warning that Oswald would be shot. Shanklin telephoned FBI Headquarters and was told to report it immediately to Dallas Police. He called both the Dallas Police and the County Sheriff at 2:15 a.m., alerting them of the warning. He was assured that Oswald would be well-guarded during the transfer from one jail to the other. At 8:15, Shanklin phoned Dallas Police Chief Curry directly notifying him of the early morning call. Three hours later Ruby killed Oswald. It was announced on November 27th that the U.S. Senate’s Judiciary Committee, headed by U.S. Senator James O. Eastland, Democrat of Mississippi, and in cooperation with the Justice Department, had planned to launch a full investigation concerning Oswald’s death.

On November 27th, according to an AP article, 20th Century Fox recalled the 350 copies of a current movie “Take Her, She’s Mine” to removed certain scenes that depicted the President and Mrs. Kennedy. In one scene, an actress playing Jackie speaks to her husband, the President. This was removed. In two other scenes an actor mimics the President’s voice in the background. The voice was dubbed over with another voice. Fox felt that it was improper to feature the deceased President in a comedy in view of the great tragedy.

A news report from Washington, D.C. announced that Jackie expressed her “great appreciation” for the enormous outpouring of letters and telegrams from the public. She and her children had received 293,000 letters and 26,000 telegrams at the White House and over 300,000 letters and telegrams combined at Hyannis Port, MA.

At the Capitol, there was a flood of new congressional legislation. In the House, there were 25 new bills, with 19 of them concerning assassinations. One bill would make it a federal crime to shoot a U.S. President, Vice President, Congressman, Senator or any high presidential appointee. Another wanted to award President Kennedy the Medal of Honor posthumously. There was House legislation for a postage stamp honoring Kennedy; a Senate bill to
name the new National Cultural Center for Kennedy; and another Senate bill to change the name of the Peace Corps to Kennedy Corps. Also, there were various bills that tightened controls on mail order sales of firearms.

Dangerous Radicals

An AP article from San Francisco reported the receipt of a Dallas letter by a San Francisco relative Retired Army Major and Mrs. Eugene Lee. Mrs. Lee didn’t want to identify her Dallas relative, but released its contents. Mrs. Lee remarked that the Dallas letter was written the day before Kennedy’s arrival. It stated: “We are worried for President Kennedy when he arrives here tomorrow. He is hated by some of the extremists, who are capable of anything. There are placards all over town calling him a traitor. Can you beat that? They are brainwashed by our newspapers, who are daily hammering about Washington as if it was some sinister foreign power. I think Kennedy is in greater danger here than when he was traveling all over Europe.” Mrs. Lee remarked that she and her husband Eugene lived in Birmingham, AL before moving to San Francisco. She made her relative’s letter public, “because it was important that the people of this country understand the type of hatred that exists in those parts of the U.S.”

Bud Nelson, who headed a chapter of the ultra-conservative Citizens Council in Tacoma, WA, was so shaken by the President’s assassination that he resigned from the organization. His resignation letter appeared in an AP article in the Bee: “Though it was a left wing communist who wantonly assassinated our President, I feel that every radical left and right had his hand on the rifle butt and finger on that trigger. We are all guilty morally of fomenting hatreds of one sort or another, thus guilty of a common act of cruelty. Therefore, I have no choice but to hereby tender my official resignation, and I pray to God that he forgive me for harboring any prejudices that I might have harbored; henceforth, I will devote my energies to our great American ideals of freedom for all, no matter the race or color or creed, and justice for all.”

Fidel Castro lashed out in another tirade from Havana on November 28th, which was published in an AP article appearing in the Turlock Journal. Castro declared, “In the eyes of the world it is clear that the reactionaries [right wing] of the U.S. wanted to make our country the victim of their criminal designs, even at the price of assassinating the President of the U.S.” He claimed that Oswald’s visit to Mexico City in September 1963, in which he sought a Cuban visa, was part of the Kennedy’s assassination plot to blame him and Cuba. Castro claimed that Oswald was deliberately killed to silence him.

Governor Connally

From Dallas, a recovering Governor Connally spoke to a UPI reporter about the shooting. Connally remarked that “We went from great joy, great anticipation to great tragedy.” He commented that they had just turned the corner, when a shot was heard, with him turning left to see the President slumping, saying nothing. “As I turned I was hit, and I knew I was hit badly, and I said, ‘My God, they are going to kill us all.’ Then there was a third shot, and the President was hit again. When he was hit, she (Mrs. Kennedy) said, ‘Oh my God, they have killed my husband – Jack! Jack!’ Then the Secret Secret agent said, ‘Get out of here and get us to a hospital.’” Connally thought he had been killed along with the President. It was his opinion that “the man did what he intended to do – shoot both of us.” Now he asked the question, why was he spared? “My God, what a horrible, horrible tragedy! In a matter of a few seconds, our lives were changed, the course of history was changed for many people.” He urged that “you do all you ought to, day by day, in trying to make whatever contribution you can to society in which you live, because you never know when your day may come.” He was very concerned about the “cancerous growth that is being permitted to expand and enlarge itself upon the community and the society in which we live, that breeds hatred, bigotry and intolerance.” On that same day, investigators were reenacting the assassination, using a gray convertible, with a man and woman sitting in the backseat, passing by the book depository. There was a cameraman in the sixth story window, filming what Oswald was to have seen.

From Moscow, an AP reported that Krushchchev expressed his satisfaction that President Johnson promised “to work for peace and better relations with the Soviet Union.” In Washington, D.C., Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin gave a file of information on Oswald to State Secretary Rusk. It was the file kept by his country on Oswald during his residency from October 1959 to mid-1962.

Bobby Kennedy

Two articles appeared in the Bee concerning the future of Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Teamster’s President Jimmy Hoffa told a meeting of Teamsters in Nashville that Bobby Kennedy was now “just another lawyer” since his brother’s assassination. He declared that he now cannot “promise promotions, as he did many times, if he secured convictions, disregarding all the ethics that normally are practiced in court cases.” Hoffa’s comments were tough. He would be facing trial in January for jury tampering, while Bobby was still Attorney General. The two adversaries hated each other so much that at recent labor union hearing, the two just stared at each other to see who would flinch first.

Joseph E. Mohbat, writing for AP in Washington, D.C., remarked that the assassination did shear Bobby Kennedy’s power, with him becoming just another member of President Johnson’s Cabinet. It wasn’t expected that he would remain Attorney General long, because he now had to consider his political future. Mohbat noted that Bobby and President Johnson were adversaries, which would cause Bobby to resign quickly. Even so, it was said that Bobby had developed a high regard for Johnson, because of the hard work and loyalty he gave President Kennedy while Vice President.

Rifle, Donations, Peace, Cape Kennedy

An AP report from Dallas of November 29th confirmed that an Irving gunsmith, Dial D. Ryder, had Oswald’s rifle at his shop for three days in October to mount the telescopic sight and set the sight correctly for aiming. The work cost $6, with Ryder remembering the rifle was a foreign brand. He commented that Oswald didn’t purchase ammunition and really couldn’t remember anything about Oswald.
It was announced in Washington, D.C. that California Governor Pat Brown and Charles P. Taft of Cincinnati, Co-Chairmen of America’s Conscience Fund, were seeking donations as a benefit to help the two Dallas widows, Mrs. Tippit and Mrs. Oswald. The organization was already raising money to repair churches that had been damaged by racial disorders in the South. Brown and Taft issued a joint statement: “The demented mind of the assassin who took the life of John F. Kennedy in Dallas is no different from the minds of the murderers who snuffed out the lives of four little girls in a Birmingham church bombing. The American people must not let the tragic death of John F. Kennedy pass without giving deep thought to the hate and intolerance which cause men to take the lives of other men. From Birmingham to Dallas this hatred has been sweeping our land.” They also proposed that on December 22nd, a month after Kennedy’s assassination, that candlelight memorial services be held throughout the U.S.

In Warsaw, Poland, a peace conference was in session, sponsored by communist nations. Soviet Union and Soviet Bloc delegates asked for a minute of silent tribute for President Kennedy. Joseph Y. Smith, reporting for UPI, disclosed that Red Chinese delegate, Tang Ming Chao, immediately objected to the pause in the conference deliberations. He declared, “We would not do honor to ourselves if we did not raise our voices in protest at the proposal to pay tribute to the late President of the U.S. Our meeting should be a meeting to discuss questions of world peace. It should not be used to eulogize any government which is pursuing a policy of intervention, war, and aggression all over the world.” The silent tribute was dismissed, with the session adjourning immediately. Communist Chinese continued denouncing both Kennedy and Johnson in their broadcasts since the assassination.

President Johnson on Friday, November 29th caught many by surprise when he announced that Cape Canaveral would be renamed Cape Kennedy, with its facilities being called John F. Kennedy Space Center. This was in recognition of President Kennedy’s space program to put a man on the moon. Cape Kennedy would become the launching pad for moon rockets. The names received wide approval, even from local businesses that had used “Canaveral” (Spanish for cane or reed field) in their business names and advertising.

**Presidential Security**

Drew Pearson took to task in his column “Washington Merry-Go-Round” the security breaches in Dallas. His criticism was aimed at the Secret Service, FBI, and Dallas Police. Pearson’s aides discovered that six Secret Service agents were still drinking alcohol after 3 a.m. on November 22nd, with one reportedly being very inebriated. They were at the Fort Worth Press Club until 3 a.m., when they asked the owner, Calvin Sutton, who was closing the club, where the all-night joint “The Cellar” was located? He tried to discourage them, seeing that they already had too much to drink. Supposedly, such clubs were to close at 10 p.m., according to local liquor laws. Sutton had invited Vice President Johnson and Governor Connally, who were “honorary members” of the club, to stop by. He made this request to provide an excuse to stay open longer that day. Both Johnson and Connally remained at their hotel, but others went to the club using “guest cards,” which included Secret Service agents, who arrived about 11 p.m. Sutton remarked he was surprised the Secret Service agents were there, because they hadn’t been invited. It was discovered that the agents were given “guest cards” by those not going. Pearson asked, how could those agents be alert enough to do their job?

He also questioned the withholding of information on Oswald from the Secret Service by the FBI. The FBI had kept Oswald under surveillance and had recently interviewed him and his wife, and yet the Secret Service wasn’t aware of it. Pearson commented that the longstanding jealousy between the two agencies was rampant to the point where they didn’t speak to one another. He declared that those agencies must seek out dangerous persons when the President visits and share that information with each other. Here was Oswald, a Marxist, former Soviet resident, and a member of a pro-Castro organization, who behaved suspiciously, and yet the FBI didn’t share that with the Secret Service or the Dallas Police. Pearson proclaimed the Secret Service should have had their own file on him, because he was seen on television and pictured in newspapers passing out pro-Castro leaflets.

Pearson then questioned the Dallas Police’s behavior when Oswald was shot by Ruby. The policemen knew Ruby. They knew he carried a concealed weapon. They knew he was prone to violence, and yet, he was allowed to slip into the police station’s underground garage to shoot Oswald. Guarding Oswald, the assassin of an American President, was perhaps the police’s most important duty ever. Pearson demanded that a special congressional committee probe these issues and other peculiarities surrounding the entire assassination tragedy.

**Warren Commission**

Pearson must have been anticipating such an investigating committee, because that same day, President Johnson announced the formation of the President’s Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy, which would be known as the “Warren Commission.” He appointed seven members to the Commission “to find the truth as far as it can be discovered about the death of President Kennedy and the subsequent murder of his accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald, and report its findings and conclusions to the President, to the American people, and the world.” He asked Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Earl Warren, a former California governor, to serve as the chairman of the Commission.

Johnson selected the Commission’s appointees very
carefully, wanting a balance of views. First of all, Warren was closely identified with issues of racial discrimination. U.S. Senator Richard B. Russell, Democrat of Georgia, was a noted strategist for civil rights opponents, and Senator John Sherman Cooper, Republican of Kentucky, a respected moderate from a border state. From the House, Johnson appointed another southerner, Congressman Hale Boggs, Democrat of Louisiana, who was the Democratic Party’s whip, and Congressman Jerry Ford, Republican of Michigan, who was the leader of GOP progressives. Johnson next chose John J. McCloy, a foreign affairs adviser to U.S. Presidents, who had been appointed to a number of important committees on international issues. McCloy was highly respected by both political parties. For his final choice, Johnson appointed Allen W. Dulles, former CIA Director and mastermind of intelligence and security.

For the next 10 months, the Commission and its aides interviewed 552 witnesses and evaluated a mountain of evidence, filing a 26 volume report and a summary in September 1964. In 1978, the House Select Committee on Assassinations reviewed the Warren Commission Report and other evidence, filing a 12-volume report in which it concurred with the Warren Report, but also concluded that President Kennedy “was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy.” This latter conclusion was to placate the many conspiracy theorists.

Benefits

On December 1st, Congressman Tom Murray, Democrat of Tennessee, introduced legislation to provide Jackie Kennedy free postage; office space for six months; $50,000 for staff employees; two Secret Service agents for six months to guard her and her children; and payment of all “expenses resulting from her husband’s death, including funeral fees, and transportation.” The legislation was passed the next day. There was already a law providing Jackie $10,000 each year for life. From Nashville, Tennessee, UPI reported that Oswald’s mother, Marguerite Oswald, was to receive $863 from National Life and Accident Insurance from a $1,000 life insurance policy on her son. Marguerite had taken the policy out when her son, Lee Harvey Oswald, was six years old. In 1957, she borrowed from it, reducing the payoff to $863.

Unfriendly Welcome

Two congressmen investigated the nature of the full-page advertisement that appeared in the Dallas Morning News, Friday, November 22, 1963, which contained inflammatory words towards President Kennedy. Democratic Congressman Bernard F. Grabowski and Republican Congressman Silvio O. Conte, both of Connecticut, expressed their “shock that a publisher would as a matter of taste, accept such material on the morning of the arrival of the President!” The congressmen described the ad as “vicious, cruel, and abusive and the kind of malicious verbiage that tends to incite fanatics.” The ad was placed by Bernard Weissmann of the conservative group American Fact Finding Committee of Dallas. The FBI was contacted and told the congressmen that it didn’t have anything on the organization. Two known conservative groups, John Birch Society and the Defenders of American Liberty, claimed that they had never heard of the Dallas committee.

The full-page ad was headlined “Welcome Mr. Kennedy,” and then it listed 12 questions that “committee wanted answers to, and we want them now.” It stated that “Because of your policy, thousands of Cubans have been imprisoned, are starving and being persecuted – with thousands already murdered and thousands more awaiting execution and in addition, the entire population of almost 7 million Cubans are living in slavery. Have you ordered or permitted your brother Bobby, the Attorney General, to go soft on communists, fellow travelers, and ultra leftists in America, while permitting him to persecute loyal Americans who criticize you, your administration, and your leadership?”

Oswald’s Soviet Union

From Moscow, UPI correspondent, Daniel F. Gilmore, reported that Pravda accused Oswald of being an American spy while he lived in the Soviet Union from October 1959 to May 1962. The source of Pravda’s information was a Fort Worth stenographer, Pauline Bates, who was helping Oswald in writing an “anti-Soviet book” about his stay in the Soviet Union. Bates reportedly stated that “Oswald hinted that he had worked as an American secret agent.” (Later investigation found that Oswald had kept a rambling journal of his life there. It was a work of criticism, which he intended to publish. He and his mother Marguerite had discussed the matter, and after his death, she told the press that she was going to have it published.)

Hate, Violence, Right Wing

On December 2nd, the publisher of the Atlanta Constitution, Ralph McGill, spoke at a news conference in San Francisco, remarking that many southern editors of major newspapers still denounced President Kennedy for his support of civil rights and civil rights legislation. Many white supremacists declare that Kennedy “died a tyrant’s death,” but McGill observed that since the assassination, there appeared to be a general moratorium on hate attacks in the nation. He thought it would return though, because “I know that the malignancy of hard core racism is not going to abate.” McGill, who strongly supported civil rights, commented that President Johnson will be hated less, because he is a southerner, but LBJ was solidly behind Kennedy’s civil rights program.

A UPI article from Philadelphia, entitled “City of Brotherly Love,” appeared in the Turlock Journal on December 3rd reporting
on the Triennial General Assembly of the National Council of Churches, an organization with membership from 31 Christian denominations. J. Irwin Miller from Columbus, IN, who headed the Council, told the Assembly that “the martyrdom of President Kennedy is a clear call to Americans to purge this land of extremism. The shocking events in Dallas have forced us to our knees in shame. If any one of us blames another, hoping thereby to distract himself from his own share of guilt, then our President has died to no purpose.” Miller, a Republican, declared, “The dreadful act was the culmination of our fears, our unharnessed hates, our selfishness, which we have tried to rename ‘liberty.’ Extremist groups have sowed seeds of dissension and discord and the country reaped part of the harvest.” He proclaimed that as Christians we must apply the basic principle of our God, “brotherly love, because it is the only thing that can hold in check the capacity for unreasoning violence, which lies in each of us, barely below the surface.”

The National Council adopted a position statement on the assassination that stated in part: “All Americans must turn from the hatred, prejudice, and bitterness that has been allowed to accelerate in this county.” It also approved a resolution commending Mrs. Kennedy for “her dignity and poise under the most shattering circumstances. She has given the world a demonstration of the grace that enables a Christian not merely to endure but to transform tragic sorrow into triumphant courage.”

The Turlock Journal on December 5th contained Pearson’s “Washington Merry-Go-Round” column entitled “Planting the Seed,” in which he criticized extreme right wing agitators for their ruinous venom. President Kennedy was to have addressed the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches (NCC) in Philadelphia on December 2nd. That same day, former Major General Walker was scheduled by the “so-called Rev. Carl McIntyre,” a defrocked Presbyterian minister, to address radio audiences on McIntyre’s program, condemning both Kennedy and the NCC. McIntyre thought it better to cancel Walker’s inflammatory radio commentary now that Kennedy was dead. Pearson declared that McIntyre and Walker, along with Dan Smoot of Dallas, Rev. Billy James Hargis of Tulsa, and the National Indignation Committee, whose leader Frank McGehee, insulted Adlai Stevenson in Dallas, “may have contributed to the atmosphere of hate and suspicion in Dallas.”

In Kennedy’s address to the NCC’s General Assembly, the President of Catholic faith was expected to speak to issues of coexistence, underdeveloped countries, armament reduction, and African development. The NCC consisted of Protestant delegates and five “Catholic observers.” Pearson wrote that when McIntyre was defrocked, he established the organization American Council of Christian Churches, which brought major confusion, because of its similar name to NCC. McIntyre labeled NCC as an “apostate, communist, and modernist, the strongest ally of the Soviet Union,” and the Catholic Church as “the hatred church and bride of the anti-Christ” and that one would “be much better off in a communist society than in the Roman Catholic fascist set-up.”

McIntyre published his propaganda in his weekly publication “Christian Beacon” and on his radio broadcasts called “The 20th Century Reformation Broadcast,” which he began in 1958 in Chester, PA. At the time of Kennedy’s assassination, his radio programs were being aired by 533 stations in the U.S. Pearson remarked that McIntyre built his following by appealing to those Americans who have a negative tendency, especially when hard luck and financial problems were of great concern. Pearson declared that “unquestionably his daily broadcasts for the past five years have had their impact in sowing seeds of discord, suspicion, and hate.” McIntyre was having financial difficulties, because donations from his followers had declined 50 percent since November 1, 1963. He sent a letter of appeal for money on November 21st, because he needed revenue to publish literature and air broadcasts for Kennedy’s visit to the NCC.

In another article, Governor Connally, who was recovering quickly from his wounds, hoped that the assassination would “shock and stun a nation and its people and the world to what is happening to us through this growth of extremism. If we are going to be destroyed it will come through extremism.”

From Washington, D.C. came a UPI announcement that the FBI had finished its investigation of the assassination and was to forward its report (evidence, findings, and conclusions) to Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who then would present it to President Johnson. He was expected to turn it over to the Warren Commission. The FBI report purportedly concluded that Oswald and Ruby were loners, carrying out their actions independently and were not connected to any conspiracy or other accomplices. The report claimed that two bullets struck Kennedy, with both being lethal. It observed that the President was hit by the first and third shots, while the second one struck Connally. (The Warren Commission would later come to a different conclusion in that the first shot struck the President and then Connally, because they were directly in line. Then the second shot struck the President’s head, while the third shot went wild and was not found.)

**President Johnson**

Walter Lippmann’s column “From Washington” of December 5th, spoke to the choice of Lyndon Johnson as a vice presidential
candidate and what he inherited from President Kennedy’s administration. He wrote that Kennedy won the election, because of Johnson, but even so, “Kennedy regarded his great rival as the man, who qualified to be president.” The transfer of power after the assassination was smooth and sure, because LBJ was the consummate politician and fierce leader. Lippmann declared that President Johnson was completely sincere in carrying forth what his predecessor had begun in national and international affairs.

Lippmann remarked that it wouldn’t be easy for Johnson, because Congress was deadlocked and foreign affairs were at a standstill. This circumstance wasn’t because Kennedy’s lack of ability to move forth, but because there was a diminished presidency, which reoccurs in U.S. history. Lippmann declared Johnson needed to restore the power of the presidency to break the deadlocks that were there. He commented that just like the diminished presidency, U.S. influence had diminished in the world. The U.S. was no longer an unchallenged world power but did remain the leader of the non-communist world. He observed that Kennedy did handle the Soviet Union brilliantly. It seemed JFK convinced the Soviets that “it could comfortably and honorably live within a balance of power” with the U.S. Lippmann remarked that Johnson faced a mess in Europe, Latin America, and Asia, with the latter region lacking any stability.

Marguerite, Malcolm X, Being Red

AP correspondent Bernard Gavzer, writing from Fort Worth, commented on December 5th that Oswald’s mother, Marguerite Oswald, ignored her son’s schizophrenic tendencies and misbehavior. She was 56 years-old now and a practical nurse. She reportedly declared, “Any guilt I have for making him what he was, I will accept.” As for the assassination, “I do not care what the FBI says, or what any special commission or court may say. He did not have a trial. He did not have his day in court. I heard him say on television, the same as millions of others heard him, ‘I did not kill anyone. I did not kill anyone.’ I know he never did it. I know my son.”

A UPI article from Chicago of December 5th reported that Malcolm X, second in command of the Black Muslim sect, “expressed joy” concerning President Kennedy’s assassination. He characterized it as an instance of “the chickens coming home to roost.” Black Muslim founder and leader, Elijah Muhammad, released a statement that Malcolm X was suspended from the anti-white sect. (Malcolm X was assassinated in February 1965.)

On December 6th, Henry Cathcart wrote in his column “March of Events,” that it was difficult to believe but a single deranged outcast was able to get close to President Kennedy for just a few seconds, killing him. Cathcart observed that with the volume of evidence made public, it seemed that circumstances merged uncannily to allow a window of exposure for Oswald to assassinate Kennedy. The radical right wing did not shed tears over Kennedy’s loss. Cathcart remarked that the radical right was angered that a radical left got to him first. The writer asked, “How does a nation rid itself of this intolerance, extremism, and hate?” Cathcart mused that it can’t be suppressed by force in a democracy. That would be intolerable. The only way was with the passing of time. Maybe through political maturity and a changing political climate it would end.

A syndicated editorial appeared in the Turlock Journal on December 6th, written by conservative Henry J. Taylor in his column “The World Today.” Taylor headlined it as “Oswald’s Act Typical Red.” The columnist characterized the assassination as something that communists do, and Oswald was that. He declared it was not about America, but about the Soviet Union. Americans should not be ashamed, should not take the position that our society produced Oswald. Pravda claimed that “President Kennedy was killed by hate festering within the U.S.” This is clever communist propaganda, Taylor wrote. The Soviets enjoyed seeing our country being tarnished, taking us down a notch. “What, conceivably has this man [Oswald] to do with the American soul? We have grievous, tragic problems in the U.S., but Oswald does not represent them.” Taylor reiterated that Oswald was a Red, and he did something Reds do – kill people for political purposes. “Americans abhor hate and violence, in anybody and by anybody. Does the Kremlin?”

Taylor declared Oswald was part of “the nature and tentacles of the Soviet spider.”

From Moscow on December 6th came the official Communist Party position on Kennedy’s assassination, even though Soviet newspapers and Moscow Radio had already remarked on the slaying. The Soviet Union claimed that the President was “eliminated by right wing extremists to change the balance of political forces in the U.S. and to stir up anti-communist, anti-Soviet, and anti-Cuban hysteria.” This declaration might have been the result of the ideological dispute between Communist China and the Soviet Union. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union wanted to summon a world conference of all communist parties to solidify its worldwide leadership.

Oswald and Fair Play for Cuba

UPI reports of December 6th, from Washington, D.C. and Chicago, contained in the Turlock Journal, disclosed that the FBI had found definite connections with Oswald and the attempted murder of former Major General Walker. The Chicago Sun-Times reported that the FBI in fact found a document in Oswald’s room where he had written about his attempt to shoot Walker. Also found were copies of a number of Oswald’s letters to leftist organizations, such to the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC). Oswald had a penchant to jot down information, write his thoughts, and draft his plans, some which were found while searching his possessions.

On December 9th, Vincent Theodore Lee, President of FPCC, a pro-Castro organization, headquartered in New York City, released six letters to the FBI that he received from Oswald. The self-proclaimed Marxist wanted the FPCC president to grant him permission to establish a chapter in New Orleans during the summer 1963. The FPCC President Lee remarked to the press that he didn’t authorize the formation of a chapter. Instead, Oswald formed one independently through his own initiative. Lee wrote Oswald, advising him to get a post office box to receive FPCC literature. He advised Oswald, “Don’t go around shooting your mouth where you work or at home so that you lose your job.” Oswald went forth though, printing 2,000 self-designed leaflets at his expense, passing them out in New Orleans. He carried a placard that read “Hands Off Cuba! Viva Fidel!” The leaflets carried information about FPCC, having the heading: “Hands off Cuba!” Oswald also designed
membership forms, printed them at his expense, and handed those out along with the leaflets.

Oswald wrote to the FPCC president that he had been attacked by anti-Castro Cuban exiles, after he had been warned by police that it was illegal to distribute literature without a permit. In the August 12th letter to FPCC President Lee, Oswald commented that he had been arrested and fined $10 for the incident, but the activity brought him coverage by the local press and an interview on local television. In his August 17th letter to Vincent Lee, he remarked that he had a flood of phone calls wanting to debate him on his pro-Castro position.

Columnist Henry J. Taylor wrote an editorial entitled “Warning in Oswald’s Letters,” published in the December 12th issue of the Turlock Journal. Taylor declared “that dead men do tell tales,” because the letters released by Vincent Lee of the FPCC left evidence of Oswald’s thinking. The columnist told of Oswald’s demonstration in New Orleans, where he was interviewed for 15 minutes by New Orleans television, Channel 4 TV and Channel 6 WDSU-TV. Oswald received a flood of calls for debate and an invite to appear on the TV program “Latin American Focus.” Oswald wrote Vincent Lee about the event, commenting that I am “happy with the developing situation here.”

Taylor was greatly disturbed by the media attention given to Oswald, declaring: “Why should media be made a patsy by such a punk? No wonder vicious elements of all kinds among us can do what they do with few numbers and very little money.” Oswald wanted media coverage and in particular television. Taylor wrote, “How simple it was to elevate his cause onto hundreds of thousands of TV sets.” He declared that this happened with television coverage of the Civil Rights March in Washington, D.C. and the dumping of garbage on the steps of New York City Hall. Taylor commented that radio and newspapers were cognizant of being used by propaganda, but television does not understand “the responsibility of the press.” He declared that Oswald’s aim to attract media was “as easy to spot as a barracuda in a bathtub.”

**Assassination Reaction Poll**

On December 8, 1963, Margery McElheny in Chicago, writing for UPI, reported on a survey by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), concerning American reaction to the assassination. NORC’s Director Peter Rossi disclosed to McElheny that they interviewed 1,500 men and women from four to eight days after the President’s slaying. It was found that “people reacted quite differently.” The “first feeling was shock and disbelief, then sorrow, exhibited by crying and intense absorption of news of the event.” Also exhibited were “upset stomachs, inability to sleep, restlessness, and headaches.” He commented that “a considerable majority of women and about half the men cried on hearing that the President had been slain.” But a “sizeable minority weren’t touched by it at all. Their notion was one of two things: ‘He had it coming to him’ or ‘he was just a man like anyone else.”’

Other comments Rossi made about the NORC’s findings: people admired Kennedy personally and identified with his views; people thought Kennedy had a contribution to make but was cut off before he could make it; people declared Jack Ruby cheated us by killing Oswald; people felt that the citizens of Dallas or the Secret Service were blameless for Kennedy’s death; and people thought the Secret Service did as good a job as possible. Generally speaking, the assassination was caused by too much hate, too much mental disease, and lack of love in Oswald’s childhood. Rossi remarked that Negroes were affected the most by Kennedy’s death. A full report of the survey was scheduled to be released within the month.

**Robert Oppenheimer**

One of LBJ’s first public acts as President was to present the Enrico Fermi Medal to Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the American physicist who coordinated the World War II atomic bomb project. After the war, he was a consultant to the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and to the U.S. Department of Defense. It was because of Dr. Edward Teller, a close associate and fellow-physicist, that Oppenheimer was denied access to the nation’s secret information on nuclear energy, beginning in 1953. After that Oppenheimer wasn’t welcome in the inner circle of nuclear scientists and others who were developing America’s nuclear weaponry.

Teller testified in an investigation that there was a question of Oppenheimer’s loyalty, because of his record of association with communists in the U.S. The AEC investigated, dismissing the disloyalty charge, but it voted to deny Oppenheimer access to nuclear weaponry secrets. It is important to note that Teller was the “Father of the Hydrogen Bomb” or “The Super,” a bomb that Oppenheimer opposed publicly, because of its massive destructive power, and it would accelerate the arms race. President Kennedy wanted to clear Oppenheimer’s name, especially because of the recent communist witch hunt in Congress. He wanted “to end the decade of hate and suspicion,” wrote syndicated columnist Drew Pearson.

Kennedy nominated Oppenheimer for the Enrico Fermi Medal, which was one of his last acts. President Johnson presented the award to Oppenheimer at a White House reception on December 12th. Pearson wrote of “Oppenheimer’s big surprise,” remarking that Teller was in attendance at the reception, because he was a former recipient of the award. Teller occupied himself at the refreshment table until President Johnson gave the Medal to Oppenheimer. There were cameras filming the moment when up steps Teller to shake Oppenheimer’s hand. Pearson declared, “This startled Oppenheimer, who stared in disbelief as the man who had driven him from government offered his congratulations.”

**FBI**

Drew Pearson continued his attack on the FBI for not sharing information on Oswald with the Secret Service. In his
“Washington Merry-Go-Round” column of December 14th carried in the Turlock Journal, Pearson remarked that Oswald was last interviewed by the FBI on November 16th, six days before the assassination. The FBI at first tried to cover up its November 16th interview. It also interviewed Ruth Paine twice, who allowed Oswald’s wife Marina to live with her and her children, while Marina was pregnant with her second child. Pearson declared that the FBI knew Oswald was unstable and irrational; he recently took a trip to Mexico City, visiting the Cuban and Soviet embassies; and was arrested in New Orleans for distributing pro-Castro literature. Why wasn’t this passed on to the Secret Service?

According to Pearson, Edgar Hoover wanted to publish the FBI’s assassination report immediately to get a jump on the Warren Commission investigations. But the Commission, through President Johnson, ordered him not to publish it, but the FBI leaked its conclusions to the press to circumvent the suppression. The FBI was one of the most powerful agencies in government and was accustomed to doing its own investigations, but now it would be investigated by the Commission concerning the issues Pearson raised in his column.

Month of Mourning Ends

It was time to end the one month’s mourning for the slain President. Barry Schweid of AP in Washington, D.C. described the events of December 23rd, which began when three religious leaders (Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish) lit a torch from the eternal flame burning at Kennedy’s grave in Arlington National Cemetery. The lighted torch was then carried aloft in an open jeep across Memorial Bridge to the Lincoln Memorial, where it was used to light a candle held by President Johnson and those of Johnson’s cabinet, Supreme Court justices, and other dignitaries. Shortly there were thousands of candles flickering held by those gathered before the Lincoln Memorial.

Johnson then spoke to a crowd of more than 14,000, repeating words from Kennedy’s inaugural address of January 20, 1961: “The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve – and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.” The candles represented the light found in Kennedy’s ideas he expressed to the world. President Johnson exclaimed, “Thirty days and a few hours ago, John F. Kennedy, 35th president of the United States, died a martyr’s death. The world will not forget what he did here. He will live on in our hearts, which will be his shrine.” He then exclaimed that “We have been bent in sorrow but not in purpose. We buried Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy, but we did not bury their dreams or their visions. They are our dreams and visions today. Their fight for a better life for more people is a legacy to their countrymen.”

Schweid wrote that Johnson then returned to the White House and turned the switch to light the National Christmas Tree. The President exclaimed let this act “lead the nation in a transition from sorrow to the joy of Christmas.” This scene and that at the Lincoln Memorial was aired on radio and television. Johnson then spoke:

“Our thoughts to others, when we are all reminded that mercy and compassion are the really enduring virtues, when all of us show, by small deeds and by large, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. So in that spirit tonight let me express to you as your President that one wish that I have as we gather here. It is a wish that we not lose the closeness and the sense of sharing and the spirit of mercy and compassion which these last few days have brought from all of us.” The month of mourning had officially ended.

Johnson’s Concern

On December 24th, Malcolm Kilduff, President Kennedy’s Assistant White House Press Secretary, spoke to UPI’s Robert Buckhorn that Johnson was concerned that there could have been a wider plot to kill those in order of presidential succession. When Johnson learned at the hospital that President Kennedy was dead, he reminded Kilduff that when Lincoln was murdered, they also tried to kill Secretary of State Seward in his house. He told Kilduff, “I think we had better wait for a few minutes [to announce the death of Kennedy]. I think I had better get out of here and get back to the plane before you announce it.” Kilduff watched Johnson’s car pull away from the hospital, and it was then he announced Kennedy’s death. He did not disclose where Johnson was. Once aboard the aircraft, Johnson telephoned Attorney General Robert Kennedy and asked him where he should be sworn in as President. Kennedy replied on the airplane. Kilduff was now aboard the airplane and was asked by Johnson to allow witnesses from the press to view the ceremony. Then in the tight space of the aircraft everyone gathered to observe the swearing in of Johnson.

Remembering JFK

In his “Merry-Go-Round” column of December 27th, Drew Pearson summed up President Kennedy. He “was wise for his age, wise in the ways of government. He was one of the rare combinations of youth, wisdom, devotion, gaiety, and humor. He had great ambitions for world peace – and if he had lived I think he would have achieved that peace.” Pearson claimed Kennedy’s “memory was phenomenal.” He could absorb figures, read quickly, and was “methodical without being mechanical.” He claimed responsibility when mistakes were made. His sense of humor was like President Franklin Roosevelt as well as his humanity. The columnist remarked that he had a heart for the less privileged and was determined to pass civil rights legislation to right the wrong done to Negroes. Pearson felt that Kennedy’s health struggles allowed him time to reflect while bedridden many months at a time, to study government and history, to reflect on humankind’s problems, producing in Kennedy a sense of duty to those hampered by maladies, not only physically but sociologically and economically. Pearson concluded that “had he not been shot down, he would have become one of our great Presidents.”

An article in the Bee of January 15, 1964, from UPI in Washington, D.C., presented comments made by Kennedy’s Cabinet members. Defense Secretary McNamara remarked that “he [Kennedy] was everything I would want to be, everything I’d want my son to be. He was an intellectual, with a very rare talent for translating thought into action, graceful under pressure, witty, fun loving, with a passion for excellence. He was that under pressure,
in times of crisis.” Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillon commented that “Kennedy was a man who kept on top of developments in nearly every department of government. He said the President often called to inquire about an item he had read in a newspaper or magazine, whether it was true and how it affected U.S. policy.” State Secretary Rusk observed that the U.S. proved to the world “the resilience of our constitutional system, the way in which we pulled ourselves together, the way in which partisan considerations were temporarily put aside to give support to a new President, the way in which he [Johnson] picked up and immediately carried on with the great stream of American policy. This was all very impressive and encouraging to people of other countries.”

Jackie spoke to the American people for the first time since the assassination in a broadcast from her brother-in-law’s office, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. She reported that she received over 800,000 messages from across the globe. She remarked that “all of his light is gone from this world. All of you who have written to me know how much we all loved him and that he returned that love in full measure.” The messages were to be placed in the Kennedy Library at Harvard University as a memorial to her husband, a living memory for future generations, especially the young, to read and study. Mrs. Kennedy concluded that “The knowledge of the affection in which my husband held by all of you has sustained me, and the warmth of these tributes is something I shall never forget.”

On February 4, 1964, at a news conference in Austin, Texas, Governor Connally talked about the blame placed on Dallas and Texas for the President Kennedy’s assassination. He remarked that he even received letters blaming him for the poor security in Dallas. It could have happened anywhere, he exclaimed, “Des Moines, Delhart [Texas] or Los Angeles.” This attitude will change, the Governor remarked, may take a decade, but it will mellow. People were upset and emotional, but the assassin, he proclaimed, was not a Texan and only in the state for a short time. “It was just coincidence that placed him in Dallas.”

Profiles in Courage

Kennedy was awarded the 1957 Pulitzer Prize in the category of “Biography and Autobiography” for his 1955 publication Profiles in Courage. He wrote the book while he was hospitalized in 1954-55 to mend his World War II back injury. He centered on the concept of “courage” or “grace under pressure.” He wrote in the opening of the first chapter: “These are the stories of the pressures experienced by eight U.S. Senators and the grace with which they endured them – the risks to their careers, the unpopularity of their courses, the defamation of their characters, and sometimes the vindication of their reputations and their principles.” A “Memorial Edition” of Profiles in Courage was announced on February 11th in an AP article in the Bee.

Bobby Kennedy had written a preface to the new edition on December 18, 1963, 26 days after his brother had been slain. RFK remarked in the preface that during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis Jack was not concerned about his own death in case of a nuclear war. He was fearful for the death of children worldwide. Jack told Bobby that he thought of “the young people who had no part and knew nothing of the confrontation, but whose lives would be snuffed out like everyone else’s. They would never have been given a chance to make a decision, to vote in an election, to run for office, to lead a revolution, to determine their own destinies.”

Bobby then addressed in the preface his brother’s life of continuous illness. He wrote that “at least one half of the days that he spent on this earth were days of intense physical pain. He had diphtheria when he was young, serious back trouble when he was older. In between he had almost every other conceivable ailment.” Bobby said Jack never complained. I “never heard him say anything which would indicate that he felt that God had dealt with him unjustly. Those who knew him well would know he was suffering only because his face was a little whiter, the lines around his eyes were a little deeper, his words a little sharper. Those who did not know him well detected nothing.”

Peace Corps

Peace Corps Director Sargent Shriver, President Kennedy’s brother-in-law, addressed the National Press Club on February 23rd, reporting on his tour of world sites where Peace Corps workers were teaching indigenous people. He said there was great sadness “from the mud huts in Peru to the villages in Turkey” at the loss of President Kennedy, a leader who gave them inspiration. He was not their lord protector, but “a man who gave people confidence that problems could be solved and that they could solve them. He did not ask that people believe in him. He asked that people believe in themselves. This touches the deepest hope of all.”

Hundreds of letters containing donations for a Dallas memorial to President Kennedy were reportedly growing. Dr. Luther Holcomb was the spokesperson for the JFK Memorial Committee. He was a Baptist minister and Director of the Dallas Council of Churches. On February 24th, Dr. Holcomb disclosed that the project was approved by Jackie, with a segment of the donations to be given to the construction of the JFK Memorial Library at Harvard University. The planned memorial in Dallas was to be a “very modest monument” of marble but would not have a statue.

Extremism

In his “News Behind the News” editorial of February 27th, Walter Lippmann wrote that there were signs that “the infection of extremism is not spreading and is, on the contrary, receding.” After
some thought, he believed it was because of these factors: “the assassination of President Kennedy, the succession of Johnson as President, and the realization, after the Cuban confrontation and the Test Ban Treaty, that nuclear war was not imminent and that Cuba, though a nuisance, was not a military danger. Last, but not least, I would put on the list the open candidacy of conservative Republican Barry Goldwater.” Lippmann commented that “the murder of President Kennedy shocked the country into a realization of what can happen if violence is unrestrained. At the same time it removed a president who was enormously admired and extravagantly hated. The country feels very much at home with the Johnson family, and it has been greatly reassured by the competence with which the Vice President took over.”

Lippmann may have been right about extremism not spreading, but on March 3rd the Bee carried an ultra-conservative editorial that had appeared in the Milwaukee Journal demonstrating that those fires of hatred still burned in America. The editorial was written by University of Illinois Classics Professor Revilo P. Oliver, who sat on the John Birch Society’s National Council. Revilo’s article entitled “Marxmanship” originally appeared in the Birch Society’s February 1964 issue of American Opinion. The John Birch Society was founded in 1958 by Robert Welch as an ultra-conservative organization. Some of the tenets of the organization promoted by Welch and Revilo were: President Eisenhower, his brother Milton Eisenhower, former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and his brother Allen Dulles were members of the communist underground. Also, it was Bircher beliefs that communists had infiltrated Congress, the Executive Branch, U.S. Supreme Court, U.S. State Department, U.S. armed forces, and U.S. radio and television networks. Professor Oliver particularly believed that “the U.S. imported mental health experts to destroy us with hallucination narcotics. Also that an international police force of Outer Mongolians or other beasts had plans to occupy the U.S. and butcher its white inhabitants.”

In his editorial “Marxmanship,” Professor Oliver declared, “So long as there are Americans, his memory [assassinated President Kennedy] will be cherished with distaste.” He wrote that Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis “was a man who in close collaboration with Khrushchev staged the phony embargo that was improvised both to befuddle the suckers on election day in 1962 and to provide for several months a cover for the steady and rapid transfer of Soviet weapons to Cuba for eventual use against us.” Oliver exclaimed that Kennedy’s assassination wasn’t done by communists, because he was planning to turn the country over to communism by 1963. The title of his article “Marxmanship” was a play on words, being derived from Oswald calling himself a Marxist and Oswald’s attainment of “Marksmen” award in Marine boot camp.

It becomes clear when reading “Marxmanship” that Oliver was a closet psychotic. His scholastic ability was nil and his intellectual capacity non-existent. One wonders how could such a tortured mind become a tenured professor at the University of Illinois? In “Marxmanship,” he wrote, “The vast cesspool in Washington was beginning to leak badly,” and that the President was assassinated to cover up “national scandal so flagrant” that, if uncovered, it would have shocked “the whole of our brainwashed and hypnotized populace back to sanity.” Oliver didn’t document any of his comments, but used this phrasing liberally “unidentified observers,” “informed sources,” “an experienced American military man” and “there are rumors.” He called his targets: “vermin,” “rats,” and “suckers.” Welch exclaimed that Oliver’s article, “Marxmanship” was “superb commentary.”

California Attorney General Stanley Mosk read “Marxmanship,” commenting on February 14th in an article from AP, Ventura, California: “The John Birch Society will live on in infamy for its despicable attack on the memory of John F. Kennedy. It seems shocking that it should come so soon after his body has been laid to rest. To suggest that President Kennedy was part of a communist plot to take over America would normally be charged as sheer lunacy, were it not now the official Birch line published in its monthly magazine.”

The student newspaper at University Illinois called for Professor Oliver’s dismissal. The editor commented to an AP reporter, “I have read the article, and at times, I felt like throwing the magazine across the room. It is a base and unwarranted attack. If it weren’t so tragic it would be almost unworthy of comment. It’s regrettable that a man in his station of life should have such ideas. I wouldn’t want my child exposed to his type of thinking.”

**Warren Commission**

The Warren Commission filed its report on Kennedy’s assassination with President Johnson, who made it public on September 28, 1964. It concluded that Oswald and Ruby acted alone and independently. The Commission’s investigation had been exhaustive and thorough. Johnson then appointed four men to advise him on the Commission’s recommendations. He wanted Congress to remain in session to receive his requests to put the Commission’s recommendations into immediate action. Former Attorney General and U.S. Senate candidate from New York, Robert Kennedy, was one of the first to comment on the report. He remarked that the Commission’s inquiry was “thorough and conscientious,” and he was satisfied that “it investigated every lead and examined every piece of evidence.” He wasn’t planning to read the full report. Not only was his brother’s death upsetting, but Bobby felt in some way he may have provoked the assassination with his ardent opposition to Castro. Texas Governor Connally declared that he agreed fully with the Commission’s conclusions.

**First Anniversary Tributes**

On November 22, 1964, the first anniversary of the assassination, crowds began flocking at dawn to Elm Street and the Texas School Book Depository. They watched the clock atop the building as it struck 12:30 p.m., the time Oswald shot Kennedy. At 1 p.m., a policeman halted all traffic in front of the book depository for a minute of silence. Dallas Mayor Erik Jonsson requested that the city be silent and still in honor of the fallen President. Throngs placed wreaths at the assassination site, with visitors still present well into the night. At 1 p.m. at Parkland Hospital, Robert Dutton, Chief Administrator, place a wreath on the door of Trauma Room One, where the President died. He closed it for the day. Dallas churches were filled, with hundreds attending memorial services. The largest group had assembled at Sacred Heart Catholic Church,
with Catholics, Protestants, and Jews in attendance. Catholic priest Rev. Oscar L. Huber presided at the Mass. He had administered last rites to President Kennedy one year before. A memorial service was held at the grave of slain Dallas Policeman J.D. Tippit. Uniformed policeman placed a wreath on Tippit’s resting place. Oswald’s wife, Marina, was being treated in a Dallas hospital with a stomach disorder. Through a spokesman, the media was told that Marina was “feeling very sorry for Mrs. Kennedy and her children.” It was reported that Marina and her children had received $6,000 in donations to help her. Mrs. Tippit had received $200,000 thus far in donations for her and her three children.

The headline in the *Bee* read: “Nation Pauses to Pay Tribute to Slain President.” At Arlington Cemetery, an estimated 30,000 filed past President Kennedy’s grave, marked by the eternal flame. According to an AP article, in line were “young adults and old, babies in carriages and aged in wheel chairs.” Hundreds of floral arrangements had been placed around the burial site. Over Cape Cod and Hyannis Port flew Air Force planes in the “missing buddy formation,” where one plane was missing representing President Kennedy. Jackie and her children were in seclusion on Long Island. Rose Kennedy attended Mass in Hyannis Port. Bobby Kennedy and his sister Mrs. Sargent Shriver visited Arlington National Cemetery. Their sister Mrs. Patricia Lawford attended Mass in Boston, in a congregation of over 3,000. Thousands stood in prayer at New York’s Kennedy Airport. President and Mrs. Johnson were present at a special memorial service in Austin, Texas. In Los Angeles, a torch was lit at the Memorial Coliseum.

Throughout the world, there was activity honoring President Kennedy. World leaders offered messages of sorrow and sympathy. A bust of Kennedy was unveiled in Amsterdam on Kennedy Avenue. A wreath was placed on the John F. Kennedy Bridge in Berlin. Warsaw’s newspaper featured a tribute to Kennedy. Soviet Communist Party’s newspaper *Pravda* praised the President as a man of peace and urged President Johnson “to develop the realistic tendencies which were planned in the Kennedy years.”

Two days later, November 24th, Jackie was scheduled to speak at a fundraising dinner at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. Her plane landed in Los Angeles, but because of the stress of the past few days, with it being the first anniversary of her husband’s death, she canceled her engagement and returned to New York. Her spokesman commented, “She feels unable to participate in any public engagements at this time. She has been through too much and just could not go out and meet people.”

Written by Robert LeRoy Santos

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**WALTER CRONKITE. CBS NEWS**

These are only the news bulletins Cronkite read from the United Press teletype on television during the first moments of the assassination. It doesn’t include commentaries that normally followed.

First bulletin: “In Dallas, Texas, three shots were fired at President’s Kennedy’s motorcade in downtown Dallas. The first reports say that President Kennedy was seriously wounded by this shooting.”

Second bulletin: “More details just arrived. President Kennedy was shot today just as his motorcade left downtown Dallas. Mrs. Kennedy jumped up and grabbed Mr. Kennedy, she called, ‘Oh no,’ the motorcade sped away. United Press says that the wounds for President Kennedy perhaps could be fatal.”

Third bulletin: “President Kennedy was shot as he drove from Dallas Airport to downtown Dallas. Governor Connally of Texas, in the car with him, was also shot. It is reported that three bullets rang out. A Secret Service man was heard to shout from the car, ‘He’s dead!’ Whether he referred to President Kennedy or not is not yet known. The President cradled in the arms of his wife Mrs. Kennedy and the car rushed to Parkland Hospital outside Dallas. The President was taken to an emergency room in the hospital. Other White House officials were in doubt in the corridors of the hospital as to the condition of President Kennedy.”

Fourth Bulletin: “President Kennedy has been the victim of an assassin’s bullet in Dallas. It is not known as yet whether the President survived the attack against him.” [He then reported that the President had been shot in the head and Connally in the chest. Cronkite continued reading bulletins as they were handed to him. He went through the history of American assassinations and attempts. He noted that Dallas had taken increased safety measures for Kennedy, because Stevenson had been attacked in Dallas the previous month.]

Another Bulletin: “We just have a report from our correspondent Dan Rather in Dallas, that he has confirmed President Kennedy is dead.”

Another Bulletin: [Cronkite was handed a bulletin. He read it, took off his glasses, and made the official announcement:] “From Dallas, Texas, the flash, apparently official: President Kennedy died at 1 p.m. Central Standard Time.” [He glanced at the clock, and said,] “Some 38 minutes ago.”

[After making the announcement, Cronkite paused briefly, put his glasses back on, and swallowed hard to maintain his composure. With noticeable emotion in his voice he intoned the next sentence of the news report:] “Vice President Johnson has left the hospital in Dallas, but we do not know to where he has proceeded; presumably he will be taking the oath of office shortly and become the 36th President of the United States.” [With emotion still in his voice and eyes watering, Cronkite recapped the events. At 3:30 EST, he reported that Johnson had been sworn in. He announced that Lee Harvey Oswald has been arrested and accused to be the assassin.]

RLS
Mongoose was a top secret operation to remove Fidel Castro and his communists from power, a prime project of the Kennedy administration. It was aimed primarily to assist Cubans to overthrow Castro’s communist regime. Cuban military dictator Fulgenio Batista capitulated to Castro and his guerrilla forces on January 1, 1959 in Havana. Castro was a native Cuban, having a law degree from University of Havana. He was imprisoned by Batista in 1953 for an attack on a Cuban Army barracks but released in 1955. Castro then formed a small guerrilla band in Mexico City and infiltrated Cuba with them in 1956, mounting a guerrilla campaign that was successful.

Castro’s takeover ended U.S. trade with Cuba, especially in sugar, liquor, and tobacco. For the American Mafia it meant the destruction of a gambling and crime empire in Havana. Castro now was the target of those wanting old Cuba returned. When he announced his allegiance to revolutionary communism, he then became the enemy of the U.S. government, because he now was a threat to American democracy and capitalism. This became a major concern of the Kennedy administration, especially Soviet Union involvement in the island, being just 90 miles from Florida, and the expansion of communism in the Western Hemisphere.

Once the Bay of Pigs Invasion failed in 1961, Operation Mongoose received President Kennedy’s authorization on November 30, 1961, as a covert operation to remove Castro. It was also known as “The Cuban Project” or “Special Group Augmented.” The operation developed 33 different plots, which gave its name “Mongoose,” because the animal consisted of 33 different species. The operation was initially planned by U.S. Air Force General Edward Lansdale and William King Harvey of the CIA.

Lansdale and Harvey presented the operation to President Kennedy on March 16, 1962 for approval, consisting of plans for propaganda and the disruption of the Cuban government and economy. It included political, psychological, military, sabotage, and intelligence operations, along with assassinations of key Cuban leaders. There were plots to destroy sugar crops, petroleum refineries, power plants, sawmills, and floating cranes, as well as mining harbors. The Joint Chiefs of Staff felt it should manage the program, but Kennedy’s brother Attorney General Bobby Kennedy placed it under his tutelage, controlling it from his office, with Lansdale being the mastermind. It secretly involved the CIA, U.S. Army, U.S. Department of Commerce, and U.S. Department of Treasury. CIA agent Harvey worked with Mafia in Miami, utilizing the mob’s Cuban connections. It was known that three six-man Mongoose sabotage teams were deployed when the Cuban Missile Crisis struck but the operations were canceled as events developed.

Mongoose consisted of some exotic gimmicks involving Fidel Castro, such as plans to contaminate his clothing with thallium, causing his beard and eyebrows to fall off and to spray his broadcast studio with hallucinogens, making him incoherent during televised speeches. Other James Bond ideas were poisoning his cigars with botulinus toxin and planting exploding seashells where he swam and dived. Political observer Noam Chomsky declared Mongoose lasted until 1975, having a budget of $50 million per year and employing up to 2,500 personnel, including 500 Americans. Castro knew he was a major U.S. target, directing his venom towards President Kennedy and others in his lengthy political speeches. Being an avid reader of media, Oswald was fully aware of Castro’s verbal attacks, revolutionary communism in Cuba, and American plans to destroy Castro’s regime. RLS