

DECEMBER 2, 1963

THE TRAGIC END OF JOHN F. KENNEDY



An assassin on November 22 shot and killed President John F. Kennedy, bringing tragedy to the nation and to the Kennedy family.

The President, when killed, was only 46 years and 5 months old. He had served 2 years, 10 months and 2 days of his first term in the White House. There was high confidence on the part of both the President and his party that the nation would re-elect him to a second term of four years in November, 1964.

The assassin killed President Kennedy with a single shot from a powerful 30-caliber rifle. The bullet struck in the neck and emerged from the back of the head.

Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy was sitting at the left side of the President in an open car when the assassin struck. She cried simply, "Oh, no" and bent over her bleeding husband. Her own life had been spared. A second shot struck Governor John B. Connally, Jr., of Texas, who was riding with the President. Mrs. Connally, also in the car, escaped injury.

Death strikes in Dallas. The shooting occurred in Dallas. President Kennedy had come to Dallas from Fort Worth earlier on November 22. This was a trip with political overtones—a trip into Texas, a highly important State that was sharply divided politically.

The reception in Fort Worth and Dallas had been enthusiastic. Both the President and Mrs. Kennedy were in high spirits. The President's wife had joined in the campaigning, and politicians were singing her praises. She had made a particularly favorable impression with a short speech delivered in Spanish.

A feeling had persisted, however, that President Kennedy was inclined to take too many chances with his own safety. He and Mrs. Kennedy had moved freely into crowds with no thought of the danger that might be involved. But it was not the danger of mingling with crowds that brought the President to death. The assassin shot from a hiding place.

All of the elaborate apparatus for protecting a President failed in the emergency. Secret Service guards, bullet-proof cars, police protection, search of the parade route, proved fruitless.

The plans had called for a week-end

2 TRAGIC END



President and Mrs. Kennedy on the tour that went from triumph to tragedy.

visit by President and Mrs. Kennedy to the ranch of Lyndon B. Johnson—the LBJ ranch near Johnson City, Tex.

Mr. Johnson, as Vice President, had invited the President to Texas and to his ranch. The Vice President had long looked forward to this visit. Then, in a moment, what was to have been a pleasant occasion for the families of the nation's leaders turned to tragedy.

Some feeling later was expressed that the Vice President and the President should not have been together on a campaign trip of this kind. Mr. Johnson was in a car behind the President during the Dallas tour.

Airport ceremony. When tragedy struck, the Vice President automatically moved to the Presidency.

Mr. Johnson was sworn into the nation's highest office at 2:38 p.m., Central standard time, on November 22. Federal Judge Sarah T. Hughes swore in the new President in the plane that then flew him back to Washington.

President Johnson is the 36th President of the United States.

John F. Kennedy had been struck down midway in life. He had behind him a heroic record in World War II, 14 years of service in House and Senate, and nearly three years as President. At the end of a second term, Mr. Kennedy would have been 51 years of age.

Mrs. Kennedy was left a widow at age 34. The Kennedys had been married 10 years last September 12. They had two children, Caroline, nearing her sixth birthday when her father was killed, and John, Jr., just three days from his third birthday when the killer struck. A boy, prematurely born to Mrs. Kennedy last August 7, died two days later.

The late President and his wife had just moved into a new home at Atoka, on Rattlesnake Mountain in Virginia. They enjoyed the seclusion of this attractive home near Washington.

Stunned and sorrowful. The tragic death sent tremors all through the world.

When Malcolm Kilduff, assistant White House Press Secretary, announced the President's death to newsmen in the Dallas hospital, every person

TRAGIC END

there wept. This was the White House news corps that had traveled widely with the President.

In the nation's capital, people were stunned. They assembled on street corners, asking: "Is it true?" Crowds gathered around the White House, expressing their grief. Children in school wept when they were told. Church bells began to toll when word of the assassination came.

In the Senate, by coincidence, the presiding officer was Senator Edward M. Kennedy (Dem.), of Massachusetts, the President's brother. He departed shortly for Hyannis Port, Mass., to console their parents, former Ambassador and Mrs. Joseph P. Kennedy.

The President's other brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, was lunching at his home in Virginia when the news of the tragedy came. He was sighted later, walking alone, head down, followed by his favorite dog.

The House was not in session when the President was struck down. One of the first to hear about the tragedy was Representative Carl Albert, of Oklahoma, the Democratic Leader. He wept. Out above the Pacific a military plane was carrying a group of Cabinet officers to Tokyo, including Secretary of State Dean Rusk. The tragic radio message prompted the plane to turn back to Washington.

Through the night, prayers. A special mass was said at Georgetown University for the slain President. The Washington Cathedral remained open all night so people could pray.

And everywhere in the capital arose the questions:

"How could such a thing happen in this country?"

And: "What has our country come to?"

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