

The Day Before Kennedy Died

NOVEMBER 22, THURSDAY, 1963—HOUSTON--

The Kennedys and Johnsons came to Houston for a dinner for Congressman Albert Thomas at the dedication of the Albert Thomas Convention Hall. My secretary, Logan Adams, and I went to what is now Hobby Airport to greet Vice-President Johnson.

Logan cared less about Kennedy and Johnson. She just wanted to see Jackie Kennedy.

On the way to the airport, Logan noticed a big sign advertising the Carrousel motel. Logan said there was a new nightclub by that name in Dallas that was popular with the college students. The nightclub was mysterious and romantic because it was run by a gangster!

Three days later the Carrousel nightclub would become famous because the gangster was Jack Ruby, who murdered Lee Harvey Oswald in the Dallas police station on Sunday morning, November 24, 1963.

Jack Valenti and I met at the airport. Jack was then a Houston Post columnist and owner of the Weekley and Valenti advertising agency. After the dinner Jack went on to Fort Worth with Vice-President Johnson and then to Washington with President Johnson.

Kennedy and Johnson went on to the dinner. I went back to the office.

The Day Kennedy Died

“BUREAUS DOWNHOLD. DALLAS ITS YOURS”

NOVEMBER 22, 1963--HOUSTON-- I was managing editor of The Houston Post. At about 1245pm, I was handed the Associated Press wire copy reproduced below.

A206'DN

BULLETIN

DALLAS, NOV.22 (AP)-PRESIDENT KENNEDY WAS SHOT TODAY JUST AS HIS MOTORCADE LEFT DOWNTOWN DALLAS. MRS. KENNEDY JUMPED UP AND GRABBED MR. KENNEDY. SHE CRIED, OH., NO!" THE MOTORCADE SPED ON.

MM1239PCS A NM

A07'DN

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BULLETIN MATTER

DALLAS-FIRST ADD KENNEDY SHOT X X X SPED ON.

AP PHOTOGRAPHER JAMES W. ALTGENS SAID HE SAW BLOOD ON

THE

PRESIDENT'S HEAD.

ALTGENS SAID HE HEARD TWO SHOTS BUT THOUGHT SOMEONE WAS SHOOTING FIREWORKS UNTIL HE SAW THE BLOOD ON THE PRESIDENT.

ALTGENS SAID HE SAW NO ONE WITH A GUN.

MM1241PCS

208DN'

BULLETIN MATTER

DALLAS-SECOND ADD PRESIDENT SHOT X X X

APEREPORER JACK BELL ASKED KENNETH O';\$9,,3)),

PRESIDENTIAL

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DALLAS-SECOND ADD PRESIDENT SHOT X X X

AP REPORTER JACK BELL ASKED KENNETH O'DONNELL, PRESIDENTIAL ASSISTANT, IF KENNEDY WAS DEAD. O'DONNELL GAVE NO ANSWER.

KENNEDY WAS REPROTED TAKEN TO PARKLAND HOSPITAL, NEAR THE DALLAS TRADE MART, WHERE HE WAS TO HAVE MADE A SPEECH.

BELL SAID KENNEDY WAS TRANSFERRED TO AN AMBULANCE. HE

LAAAAAAAAAAAA

I went to the “wire room” to read the news service printers. The room was already beginning to fill up as the word spread around the building.

The AP Atlanta Bureau had been filing a story when Dallas broke in:

BULLETIN
DALLAS—PRESIDENT SHOT

The wire was silent for a minute or so. Atlanta started babbling again.

New York broke in:
BUREAUS DOWNHOLD. DALLAS ITS YOURS.

The story began to unfold. Governor John Connally was severely wounded. (When Connally died in 1993, doctors attributed his death in part to that wound.) Priests were called to Parkland Hospital. Last rites were administered. Kennedy died.



To Bill Williams
With love and appreciation
Ripdon Williams
wife
Dwight Rine
Dec 11, 1963

Vice President Johnson was already aboard Air Force One at Love Field, where the Secret Service had taken him for security. He sent for Judge Sarah T. Hughes to administer the oath. Mrs. Kennedy, in her blood-spattered dress, boarded the plane, with President Kennedy's coffin. Johnson took the oath, flanked by Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Kennedy.

Here was I, hanging over the printer, aware that this was the biggest story I would ever handle, aware that my reputation as a newspaperman would depend on what I did in the next few minutes.

But I didn't know what to do. Managing editors are supposed to know what to do.

J. D. Hancock, the city circulation manager, was standing beside me at the printer. I had known J. D. most of my life. He had been selling The Houston Post for 50 years.

"Bill, you're going extra aren't you?" said J. D. Suddenly I knew what to do- put out an extra edition.

But how?

Television news had pretty well killed off extra editions. The last extra The Houston Post had published was when the French freighter Grandcamp blew up Texas City, killing hundreds of people, in 1947. There aren't many folks in the newsroom of a morning paper at 1pm. Production people--printers, engravers, stereotypers, pressmen, and mailers--are also pretty scarce at that time of day.

But under the superb direction of News Editor Ted Welty, the extra started to come together. I put a black reverse bar with four crosses on it across the top.

Printers and pressmen are real newspaper folks. They came in spontaneously so that we were on the street about three hours after the decision to go extra. As far as I know we were on the street before any other central time zone morning paper. (See illustration.)

I chartered a plane and sent four reporters and photographers to Dallas. I also passed a law that whenever the President was in Houston, an assistant managing editor had to be on duty.

NOTES ON THE WIRE COPY:

“A206’DN” means this was the 206th story to move on the “A”. or main AP, wire that day. The story was filed by the Associated Press Dallas Bureau (DN). (Bob Johnson, the bureau chief, was the lead newsman on the story. He wrote an excellent account of the day in *AP World* in 1972. (Exhibit A) The lead (or “first take”) was filed at 1236PM, Central Standard Time. A framed copy has hung in my office ever since.