

Dallas, experiencing an exceptionally warm and friendly greeting, as the motorcade went down the slope of Elm Street toward the railroad underpass, a rifle shot was heard by me; a loud blast, close by. I have handled firearms for fifty year, and thought immediately that it was a rifle shot. When the noise of the shot was heard, the motorcade slowed to what seemed to me a complete stop (though it could have been a near stop). After what I took to be about three seconds, another shot boomed out, and after what I took to be one-half the time between the first and second shots (calculated now, this would have put the third shot about one and one-half seconds after the second shot—by my estimate—to me there seemed to be a long time between the first and second shots, a much shorter time between the second and third shots—these were my impressions that day), a third shot was fired. After the third shot was fired, but only after the third shot was fired, the cavalcade speeded up, gained speed rapidly, and roared away to the Parkland Hospital.

I heard three shots and no more. All seemed to come from my right rear. I saw people fall to the ground on the embankment to our right, at about the time of or after the second shot, but before the cavalcade started up and raced away.

Due to the second car, with the secret service men standing on steps on the sides of it, I could not see what was happening in the Presidential car during the shooting itself. Some of the secret service men looked backward and to the right, in the general direction from which the rifle explosions seemed to come.

After the shooting, one of the secret service men sitting down in the car in front of us pulled out an automatic rifle or weapon and looked backward. However, all of the secret service men seemed to me to respond very slowly, with no more than a puzzled look. In fact, until the automatic weapon was uncovered, I had been lulled into a sense of false hope for the President's safety, by the lack of motion, excitement, or apparent visible knowledge by the secret service men, that anything so dreadful was happening. Knowing something of the training that combat infantrymen and Marines receive, I am amazed at the lack of instantaneous response by the Secret Service, when the rifle fire began. I make this statement in this paragraph reluctantly, not to add to the anguish of anyone, but it is my firm opinion, and I write it out in the hope that it might be of service in the better protection of our Presidents in the future.

After we went under the underpass, on the upward slope I could see over the heads of the occupants of the second car (Secret Service car) and could see an agent lying across the back or trunk of the Presidential car, with his feet to the right side of the car, his head at the left side. He beat the back of the car with one hand, his face contorted by grief, anguish, and despair, and I knew from that instant that some terrible loss had been suffered.

On arrival at the hospital, I told newsmen that three rifle shots had been fired. There was then no doubt in my mind that the shots were rifle shots, and I had neither then or now any doubts that any other shots were fired. In my opinion only three shots were fired.

The attached photograph from pages 24 and 25 of the *Saturday Evening Post* of December 14, 1963, shows the motorcade, as I remember it, an instant after the first shot. [Photograph is Yarborough Exhibit A.]

Given and sworn to this 10th day of July, 1964, at Washington, District of Columbia.

Signed this 10th day of July 1964.

(S) Ralph W. Yarborough,
RALPH W. YARBOROUGH.

TESTIMONY OF KENNETH P. O'DONNELL

The testimony of Kenneth P. O'Donnell was taken at 12:05 p.m., on May 18, 1964, at the White House Office, Washington, D.C., by Messrs. Norman Redlich and Arlen Specter, assistant counsel of the President's Commission.

Mr. SPECTER. Would you rise, please? Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you shall give in this deposition proceeding before the President's Com-

mission on the Assassination of President Kennedy will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I do.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. O'Donnell, the purpose of our asking you to testify today is to obtain whatever knowledge you have about the origin of the trip to Texas by President Kennedy, the events during the trip, and the trip back to Washington, D.C., on November 22. With that general statement of purpose, I will ask you if you have any objection to giving a deposition at this time?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I do not.

Mr. SPECTER. Would you state your full name for the record, please?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Kenneth P. O'Donnell.

Mr. SPECTER. What were your duties on November 22, 1963?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I was special assistant to the President. I was in charge of his appointments and any itineraries that he might have.

Mr. SPECTER. How long had you served in that capacity?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I served as special assistant to the President since the inauguration, January 20, 1961, with the same duties.

Mr. SPECTER. Were you a party to the original conversations and decision for President Kennedy to make a trip to Texas in November of 1963?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I was.

Mr. SPECTER. Would you outline the origin of that trip to Texas, please?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The origin of the trip I would think came from a conversation between the President, then Vice President Johnson, and myself. It concerned President Kennedy's desire, and President Johnson's desire that he come to Texas and spend some time there, looking forward to the campaign of 1964, in which Texas would play a very vital role in President Kennedy's view.

Mr. SPECTER. Approximately when did that first conversation occur, Mr. O'Donnell?

Mr. O'DONNELL. We had been discussing this for almost 6 or 7 months, but the time had never seemed quite right, either in the Vice President's mind or in Governor Connally's mind. Governor Connally and the Vice President had discussed this. They arrived at a general agreement that it be done some time in the latter part of the month of November. I think this decision probably came in October, some time in October.

Mr. SPECTER. When had President Kennedy been in Dallas prior to the trip of November 1963?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The last time the President had been in Dallas was as a candidate for the Presidency.

I correct myself. He had been to—visit Speaker Rayburn in the hospital. I was not on that trip.

Mr. SPECTER. Then aside from the trip to see Speaker Rayburn, in the hospital, had the President been in Dallas at all since the campaign of 1960?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He had not.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you know approximately when it was that President Kennedy visited Speaker Rayburn in the hospital in Dallas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't know exactly. It would be just before he passed away.

Mr. SPECTER. Does October 1961 sound about right to you?

Mr. O'DONNELL. It sounds about right.

Mr. SPECTER. And how many times had President Kennedy been to Texas between the campaign of 1960 and November 1963, if you know?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, he had been to the Speaker's funeral at Bonham. He had been to Houston, to see the new space center, and also he spoke at Rice Stadium. And he had been to El Paso, on a military inspection tour.

Mr. SPECTER. Are those, then, all the trips he made, to your knowledge?

Mr. O'DONNELL. That is all I can recollect at the moment.

Mr. SPECTER. In a general way, what was the purpose of the President's trip to Texas in November of 1963?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, he hadn't conducted any political activities in Texas. There were great controversies existing. There was a party problem in Texas that the President and the Vice President felt he could be helpful, as both sides of the controversy were supporting President Kennedy, and they felt he could

be a bridge between these two groups, and this would be helpful in the election of 1964. I think that is the major reason for the trip.

Mr. SPECTER. Was President Kennedy motivated, to any extent at all, by his interest in making himself as President available to the people generally in every section of the country, including Texas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Very definitely. The President's views of his responsibilities as President of the United States were that he meet the people, that he go out to their homes and see them, and allow them to see him, and discuss, if possible, the views of the world as he sees it, the problems of the country as he sees them. And he felt that leaving Washington for the President of the United States was most necessary—not only for the people, but for the President himself, that he expose himself to the actual basic problems that were disturbing the American people. It helped him in his job here, he was able to come back here with a fresh view of many things. I think he felt very strongly that the President ought to get out of Washington, and go meet the people on a regular basis.

Mr. SPECTER. Did he enjoy that exposure, strictly as a personal matter?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He enjoyed it very much. The President—liked people, and he liked to mingle with people.

Mr. SPECTER. When were the specific dates of November 21 and November 22 finally set as being the precise times for the trip to Texas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, I am not clear in my recollection of that. I would think some time early in November. I know Thanksgiving was one of the problems we had to work with. We decided that would be the best time to go, in that general area, and we, in general, would keep a file—once we agreed we were going to Texas—we would keep a file on all the speaking engagements, all the invitations the President had received.

I would go to that file and select some that might look promising. One of them that I recollect was an invitation from Congressman Albert Thomas, or his committee, that was giving him an appreciation dinner—not the Congressman himself. And the President was very fond of Congressman Thomas, he was most helpful to him, and I knew he would want to go, if this was at all possible. I would think that probably had more to do with setting the actual definite dates of the 21st and 22d.

Mr. SPECTER. When, if you recall, was the Secret Service notified of the forthcoming trip to Texas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I would think they would be notified around the first week in November. The general desire is that they have the specific information at least on the places that he might go 3 weeks prior to the trip.

Mr. SPECTER. And who among the members of the Presidential staff would be charged with the responsibility for coordinating the trip with the Secret Service?

Mr. O'DONNELL. That would be my responsibility. The manner in which we would set it up would be that I would notify the head here, who is Gerry Behn, and Gerry Behn would ask me when we were sending people down, so that his people and our people could go down at the same time. And I recollect that Jerry Bruno was one of them.

The first step would be to confer with the Governor, go over the general proposals that the Governor would make, and then bring it back to me. And I would go over it with the Governor and the Vice President and the President.

Mr. SPECTER. What planning was undertaken with respect to the determination of the motorcade route through Dallas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, I think once we arrived—we chose the four cities we were going into. And then the advance men and the Secret Service went out. Then we would work backwards from where we had to be at what time, and what things we had agreed we would do there. And the original—Dallas, as I recollect, was going to be an evening affair. The Governor thought the evening affair should be in Austin, and that we should hit Dallas around noontime.

Mr. SPECTER. When you say the evening affair, what are you referring to specifically there?

Mr. O'DONNELL. There was a political dinner which was to be conducted at

Austin that evening, at the end of which the President was going with the Vice President to the ranch. This was a political fundraising dinner.

Mr. SPECTER. Now, had there been any conversation given at all to omitting a motorcade through Dallas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. None.

Mr. SPECTER. And what were the considerations behind the decision on having a motorcade through Dallas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, we had a motorcade wherever we went. Particularly when we went to a large city, the purpose of going there was to give the President as much exposure to the people of Dallas and vice versa, the people of Dallas to the President, as possible.

The speaking engagement was a luncheon which was rather limited. And the President would not want to leave Dallas feeling that the only ones that were able to see him were a rather select group. So it would be automatic, and we would not even proceed with instructions, that the advance man and the Secret Service would, within the time allotted to them—would bring the President into Dallas, through an area which exposes him to the greatest number of people.

Mr. SPECTER. When was a decision made, if you recall, as to the precise route that the motorcade would follow through Dallas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't recall. I would think it would be perhaps a week before the final decision was made. The President would not involve himself in anything like this. Once we agreed on where he would go, that was my responsibility to work it out. The normal course of events—they would say to me, "Do you want a motorcade in Dallas?" I would say, "Yes; this is how much time you have got." They would work out a motorcade. The Secret Service would time the route. Once they had worked out this point, they would come back to me and say, "We have accomplished the purpose you want." The Secret Service would say it takes so much time, the Governor would say "You have to be here at a certain time." Once all those are put together, the route is laid out and accepted.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you recall how long after the determination of the motorcade route that that information was transmitted to the press in Dallas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't. I would think on the transmission to the press that that would not come from here anyway. That would come from down there. I would think the Governor's office would probably put that out. We would under normal circumstances inform through Mr. Salinger's office, I would inform him of the trip, and then I would give him a schedule that is given to me by the Secret Service, which would give the times, but no routes—times and locations, and would go along that he would arrive at 12 o'clock, address such and such a group at 1 o'clock. So we would not normally be privy—they could be saying to me, "We are going down 12th Street"—it would not mean anything to me. So I would think that our advance man and the Governor's advance man would make a decision on when they were going to announce the route.

I would think that was almost normal. You might say you wanted to do it 4 days ahead of time in New York, and the local fellow would really determine it—"Down here we do it this way."

Mr. SPECTER. Would the route be disclosed to the press as a matter of normal procedure in general as soon as it was ascertained?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Yes.

Mr. SPECTER. Were there any factors peculiar to Dallas which delayed the determination of the motorcade route?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The only factor that really did hold up a final decision was we had not been able to finally agree on where he would end up and where he would deliver the speech. There was a controversy between the Governor, and between some of the local democratic figures, and between our people, as to whether the place finally selected was the best place for the President to give the address. The Governor felt very strongly on it. And we finally acquiesced to his views. But I would think that came rather late in the game, and it would have altered the route quite dramatically.

Mr. SPECTER. Would you tell us if there was any consideration at all given to omitting Dallas as a stop on the trip in Texas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't think so; no. I would think that the President would

not have—once he had agreed to go to three or four other cities, that he could not possibly go to Texas and avoid Dallas. It would cause more controversy—and it would not accomplish for us what really was the long-range purpose of the visit.

Mr. SPECTER. And the long-range purpose was what, sir?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Was to attempt to in some way bridge the gap between the two political groups in Texas who were at odds, and to assist the President and prepare for the 1964 campaign as best he could at this period of time.

Mr. SPECTER. What was the President's reaction towards Dallas generally, if you know, with respect to the current publicity about, say, Ambassador Stevenson's reception there?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, he was not in anyway concerned about it. I think that the President was a very charitable man. He felt that really the picture of Dallas as painted—and as a reflection of their press in many ways—was not the real picture of Dallas; that they were Americans like everybody else, that there were good and bad, and the fact that 50 shouting people didn't portray the city of Dallas. He had been there in the 1960 campaign when the Vice President had been spit upon, and the President received one of the finest receptions he ever got. He didn't carry the city. They opposed him. But they were not particularly different than anybody else. And that wouldn't concern him, and I think, very frankly, the more difficult it was the more he liked to go there. But I think he generally felt that the loud noises emanating from Dallas were a very small minority, and so reflected.

Mr. SPECTER. Had there been any discussion about limiting the trip to Texas to a 1 day venture?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't recollect any. I do know one of the original thoughts was that he go to this dinner in Austin, which was a political dinner. Whether there was any consideration in some other people's minds that he just go in for the dinner and leave, I know he, number 1, would not consider it.

Mr. SPECTER. Why not?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He would not consider it because he had a great aversion to going into any place to a fundraising political dinner in which he felt that the people that were there were not really representative of the people, but were politically committed people, where it was a business meeting. And he thought this reflected to some degree on the office of the Presidency, that on his only visit to Texas, or any other State in 3 years, that he came to raise money for a political party, that he owed to the people to expose himself to them. So he he felt it was a duty of the Presidency to expose himself to the public. So he would not go to any place on a purely—but he certainly considered there were some political problems in Texas—that would also be in his judgment a bad political mistake. So I don't think there was ever any question that he would go some place else.

Mr. SPECTER. Did you accompany the President on all phases of the trip to Texas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I was with him when he left. The only time that I was not with him was at Congressman Thomas' dinner. He went to the dinner. We ate at the hotel and went directly to the airport.

Mr. SPECTER. When did you depart, then, from Washington, on that trip to Texas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, we left that morning by helicopter from the lawn. I think the records show it is 10:45. But the schedule was on time, certainly arriving there, and, as I recollect, we were on time pretty much the whole way as the schedule would reflect.

Mr. SPECTER. And from the helicopter at the White House lawn, where was your first stop by helicopter?

Mr. O'DONNELL. We stopped and boarded *Air Force 1* at Andrews Air Force Base.

Mr. SPECTER. Would the time of 11 a.m., as reflected in the records, be accurate as your point of departure, then, from Andrews Air Force Base?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Yes; I would think it would be.

Mr. SPECTER. And your first stop in Texas was what?

Mr. O'DONNELL. San Antonio.

Mr. SPECTER. Arrival time of 1:30 p.m.—would that be an accurate time of arrival, within a few minutes, say, of when you actually set down in San Antonio?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I would think that is right. As I say, we were on schedule, and the schedule would indicate we were due to arrive at 1:30.

Mr. SPECTER. What were the activities at San Antonio, Tex?

Mr. O'DONNELL. We motorcaded through San Antonio and went to the Aerospace Medical Center, where the President made a speech, and from there to a second airport. We had moved *Air Force 1* from one airfield to another, on the other side of the city.

Mr. SPECTER. At the Aerospace Center, was there a dedication there of some new facilities?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Yes.

Mr. SPECTER. Was there any other public appearance, then, besides the one you mentioned, in San Antonio?

Mr. O'DONNELL. No.

Mr. SPECTER. To where did you go from San Antonio?

Mr. O'DONNELL. We flew to Houston.

Mr. SPECTER. And about what time did you arrive in Houston?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I would have to look at the record.

Mr. SPECTER. Was it late in the afternoon on November 21?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Late in the afternoon, I would think around 4 or 5 o'clock.

Mr. SPECTER. And what were the activities in Houston?

Mr. O'DONNELL. We drove from the airfield into the hotel. As I recollect, there were very large crowds.

Mr. SPECTER. Was that a motorcade procession, also?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Motorcade; and particularly as we got in downtown Houston, the crowds were very large, and very enthusiastic. Getting in the hotel was somewhat of a chore.

Mr. SPECTER. What public appearances did the President then make in Houston?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The President spoke at the appreciation dinner for Congressman Thomas. The records will show the location. I did not accompany him. And I went directly from the hotel to the airport, and met him as he got aboard the plane.

Mr. SPECTER. Approximately when did the Presidential party depart from Houston?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, I would have to guess again. I would think around 10:30 or 11 o'clock. The alternative was staying overnight in Houston, getting in early in the morning—or getting into Fort Worth late at night, and allowing the President a little more rest, and we selected going to Fort Worth that night.

Mr. SPECTER. What were the public appearances made by the President, then, in Fort Worth, Tex.?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He spoke at 8 o'clock that morning at a breakfast which was given by the business community, as I remember, came back up to his room, chatted for a few minutes, went back down. It had been raining. The sun had just come out. He went out and spoke to a group assembled in the parking lot and went back and departed for—came back upstairs, we chatted for a few minutes again, and then came back down and departed for Carswell.

Mr. SPECTER. And how did the President travel out of Fort Worth?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He left Fort Worth in an open car, traveled by car to Carswell.

Mr. SPECTER. And from Carswell, what was his mode of travel?

Mr. O'DONNELL. *Air Force 1* to Love Field, Dallas?

Mr. SPECTER. What were the weather conditions on the arrival at Love Field in Dallas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The weather was clear, sunny, excellent weather.

Mr. SPECTER. What decision had been made as to whether to have an open car in Dallas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The decision had been made to have an open—if the weather was good, he would ride in an open car.

Mr. SPECTER. And do you recall who made that decision?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, I would make that decision under normal circumstances. But it was almost an automatic decision, that whenever the weather was clear, he preferred to ride in an open car.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you recall at approximately what time the Presidential party arrived at Love Field, Tex.—Love Field, Dallas, Tex.?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I would think it would be around 11, 11:15. We were on time. We always allowed a few minutes at the airport, because he always shook hands with the crowd. So we left—my recollection is that we departed from Love Field approximately according to the schedule.

Mr. SPECTER. What were President Kennedy's activities at Love Field?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He had no scheduled activities. It was a matter of assembling the motorcade. He got off *Air Force 1*, and he went over to the crowd that was gathered around the rail, shook hands, went up and down.

Mr. SPECTER. What type of a crowd was it with respect to size?

Mr. O'DONNELL. It was a large crowd.

Mr. SPECTER. Would you tell us how the motorcade was constituted with respect to the general number of the cars and the way they were lined up, if you recall, please?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, I can't go more than—I got into the second car, and I didn't really look behind me. There was some controversy as to what Congressman sat in what car. We had a lot of Congressmen with us and a lot of dignitaries, and there was a lot of juggling around, which Mr. O'Brien was more involved with than I was, as to where Senator Yarborough and the Vice President and the Congressman sat. But it was a lengthy motorcade, more lengthy than normal. We always tried to keep them down as much as possible. But because of the number of Congressmen and the dignitaries involved.

Mr. SPECTER. How many cars were there ahead of yours?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, I think there was a scout car, which was the lead, the President's vehicle, and I was in the car right behind him, in the Secret Service followup car.

Mr. SPECTER. Who else besides you was in that car?

Mr. O'DONNELL. David Powers was with me. All the rest were agents.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you recall whether anything unusual occurred on the trip from Love Field down to the center of Dallas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. No; I thought it was normal—the crowds, going through the suburbs, were, I would say, from medium to heavy for that trip. I noted they were mostly white collar, mostly industrial places we passed by which I would say were highly technical. Therefore, the crowd reflected a middle to an upper class type. They were not unfriendly nor terribly enthusiastic. They waved. But were reserved, I thought.

Mr. SPECTER. Where were you seated in the car?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I was seated in the front jump seat—the jump seat.

Mr. SPECTER. On the left-hand side or the right-hand side?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Left-hand side.

Mr. SPECTER. And who sat on your immediate right?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Mr. Powers.

Mr. SPECTER. How many agents were there in front of you?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, there were the normal two or sometimes three in the front seat. I would not be clear as to how many there were. I would think there were about—just guessing—seven or eight agents in the car. Some on the running board, some seated, depending on the speed of the motorcade, or the activity.

Mr. SPECTER. Was there a front seat in the car, immediately ahead of you?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Yes.

Mr. SPECTER. And was that occupied by Secret Service agents?

Mr. O'DONNELL. It was.

Mr. SPECTER. And how about immediately to your rear? Was there a rear seat?

Mr. O'DONNELL. There was a rear seat. There were agents in that—again depending on the speed of the motorcade they were either on the running board, or as it slows up and the crowds got larger the agents would get on the running board. But as it moved along rather rapidly, as it did on the way in, they were seated most of the time.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you recall whether or not the President's automobile made any stops en route from the airport into the downtown area?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't recollect, clearly. I would be surprised if it did not. But I don't have any clear recollection.

Mr. SPECTER. Was it a usual practice for the President to make a stop on the motorcade?

Mr. O'DONNELL. If the crowds got too large, he would stop, or if he saw some child had gone to some great extreme with a sign, he would sometimes stop. Usually unless the crowds were particularly heavy, or indicated a need for a stop, he would not stop.

Mr. SPECTER. And what was the nature of the crowd in downtown Dallas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The nature of the crowd was extremely heavy, one of the heaviest I have seen in any American city.

Mr. SPECTER. How did they compare with the crowds during the 1960 campaign in Dallas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I would think probably heavier. But very close. They were both very large crowds, very enthusiastic. I think, as I have always noticed, to the President and candidate there is a different aura. But that would be the only difference I would notice in the crowd. There was a little bit more respect—still the same enthusiasm. At the last trip in Dallas he stopped the motorcade every 5 minutes—they mobbed the car. There was none of that. But they were in the middle of the street and off the sidewalks. So there was a very narrow lane to progress through. But they were still very orderly, but cheerful.

Mr. SPECTER. Did you have any specific reaction to the Dallas crowd in terms of what your expectation might have been about Dallas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, I was pleased with it. As a politician, I was particularly pleased with it. I thought we had accomplished what we had come to Dallas to do, was, one, to establish the fact that the average person living in that city was no different than any other American, and that they respected and admired their President. And I felt one of the greatest things that does occur of a political nature is the Congressmen and the political leaders who had also been reading the same newspaper about how unpopular he was, it is good for them to see it really is not true, it is a reflection of a very small minority, and that the President of the United States was extremely popular in Dallas.

And that was the basic reason we went. And as we finished through the business section of town, that was my pleased impression.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you recall the scene when you left the Main Street of downtown Dallas, with respect specifically to the presence of a large building which was immediately ahead of the motorcade?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I did not. I was looking at the crowd. And I frankly didn't look at the building, except when there were people in the windows. And as we made that turn, I had been standing—I remember I sat down. And as far as I was concerned, that was the end—we were then going to the luncheon—and I didn't notice any building at all.

Mr. SPECTER. Were you familiar with the identity of the specific plaza there, being known as Dealey Plaza?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I was not. I afterward have reflected on it many times.

Mr. SPECTER. Tell us what occurred then as you made that turn away from the crowded downtown Dallas area and headed toward the plaza area.

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, I sat down. I remember saying to Dave Powers that it was a fantastic crowd. He agreed.

We turned. I remember the overpass. And then the shots occurred—which, at that time, I did not know were shots. My first impression was it was a firecracker. And then either somebody said, "He has been hit," or I noticed the slump—he had been waving out the right side of the car, and I noticed him slump over toward Mrs. Kennedy, and I realized then that they had been shots. But as fast as that realization occurred, I saw the third shot hit. It was such a perfect shot—I remember I blessed myself. I was rather convinced that was a fatal blow.

Mr. SPECTER. When you say you made a turn, which way did the motorcade turn?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Turned to the left.

Mr. SPECTER. And approximately how far behind the Presidential vehicle was the followup car at that time?

Mr. O'DONNELL. My guess would be 5 to 8 feet, the normal—when there are large crowds, pressing in on the side, they try to stay close. It was moving at a steady pace. The crowds were orderly. So he was at a normal—I would presume they were just about turning to step up the speed a little bit, because there would be no crowds from there.

Mr. SPECTER. What is your best estimate of the speed of the President's vehicle at that time?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, I would think we probably were going between 15 and 20, up until that moment, and I think he probably had just begun to accelerate probably up to about 25, somewhere in that vicinity.

Mr. SPECTER. Had the Secret Service followup car completed its left-hand turn prior to the time the shots rang out?

Mr. O'DONNELL. My recollection is they had, just about.

I don't recollect a separation of this nature. It was a slight sloping turn, as I remember, and I thought we were right together.

Mr. SPECTER. So that when you just indicated with your hands, you were showing a pattern of the Secret Service car having made the turn and straightened up immediately behind the Presidential vehicle proceeding down the street?

Mr. O'DONNELL. That is my impression.

Mr. SPECTER. And was the overpass in sight at that time, did you say?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Yes; it was.

Mr. SPECTER. On which side of the car was President Kennedy seated?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He was on the right side.

Mr. SPECTER. The extreme right?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The extreme right.

Mr. SPECTER. And what was he doing with his hands prior to the time of the shooting, if you recall?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He was waving. We had just left the mass of crowds. But as we turned on the grass plot there were four or five people there, and I believe he waved to them.

Mr. SPECTER. Indicating a right-handed wave?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Yes.

Mr. SPECTER. Where was Governor Connally seated with respect to the President?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He was directly in front of the President.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you know whether or not the President's seat was raised or was it in its extreme low position at that time?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I would not know.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you know what the President's practice was as to whether or not the seat would be raised?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't know that, either.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you know what the controls were on the Presidential automobile for raising or lowering the President's seat?

Mr. O'DONNELL. No; I don't.

Mr. SPECTER. How many shots were there in all?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Three.

Mr. SPECTER. What is your best estimate as to the total time which elapsed from the first shot to the last shot?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I would say 5 to 6 seconds.

Mr. SPECTER. And was there any distinguishable tempo to the shots?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Yes; the first two came almost simultaneously, came one right after the other, there was a slight hesitation, then the third one.

Mr. SPECTER. And what was your reaction as to the source of the shots, if you had one?

Mr. O'DONNELL. My reaction in part is reconstruction—is that they came from the right rear. That would be my best judgment.

Mr. SPECTER. Was there any reaction by any of the other people around in any specific direction?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The agents all turned to the rear. I would think, watching the reaction of the President when the shot—the first shot hit—that it would

be automatic it would have to have come from the rear. I think any experienced agent would make that assumption immediately.

Mr. SPECTER. And was the reaction of the agents which you have referred to as coming from the rear, to the right rear or to the left rear?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The reaction I note would be right rear. And, again, looking at the manner of the President's movement, I would think you would have to feel the thrust of the shot was from the right rear.

Mr. SPECTER. Now, what was there about the President's movement which leads you to that conclusion?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He was leaning out waving. He may have just been withdrawing his hand. And the shot hit him, and threw him to the left. He slumped on Mrs. Kennedy.

Mr. SPECTER. Were you able to determine a reaction on that slumping movement, as to whether it was the first, the second, or the third shot?

Mr. O'DONNELL. It was not the third shot. Whether it was the first or second, I would not know.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you think it could have been the second shot?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Yes; I do. If I had to pick one of the two, I think it might have been the second shot. It seemed to be—but, again, it is a foggy recollection—it seemed to have been that his movement coincided—with such a slight difference of time, that is just guesswork.

Mr. SPECTER. Did you observe any reaction of Governor Connally in the car?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I saw the Governor turn toward the President. The President, in that period of time, had been—they were one right behind the other. And the only reason I would even notice it was when the President had slumped to the left, the Governor then turned, and he was in my view. Otherwise, he would not have been. But the President slumped over, and, therefore, the Governor just turned and I could see him. I had no knowledge that he had been hit at that time.

Mr. SPECTER. When did you get the first knowledge that he had been hit?

Mr. O'DONNELL. When the third shot came. The President was hit. The motorcade accelerated. And one of the agents said, "The Governor has been hit, too."

Mr. SPECTER. Prior to the time that President Kennedy shifted to the left, then, could you see the Governor at all from your position?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Depending on how each one moved, normally, no. The President was directly behind the Governor. But if the President was over to the right waving, then you could see the Governor.

Mr. SPECTER. On the President's left when the Governor—

Mr. O'DONNELL. If the President was all the way to the right, the Governor, who was in front of him, would be visible to us. If they were both sitting, they were not. But they did confer back and forth. So the Governor was visible upon occasion. But when he turned around, it was really the first time I had been able to see him clearly.

Mr. SPECTER. At a time, though, when the President was on the extreme right-hand side, waving, would the Governor then have been visible on the President's left or on his right?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He would be on his left.

Mr. SPECTER. Was the jump seat situated, if you know, to the precise front of the President, to the right, to the left, or what?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't know.

Mr. SPECTER. What reaction did you observe, if any, as to Mrs. Kennedy during the shots?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, he slumped on her. She appeared to be immediately aware that something had happened. She turned toward him. And then the third shot hit. Obviously, she then knew what happened. She turned, looking at the backup car. Meanwhile Agent Hill had gotten off the car and started running up. She was clambering toward the back, and reached his hand, and he was on the car.

Mr. SPECTER. Did you observe any reactions in the President's car other than those which you have now testified about?

Mr. O'DONNELL. No.

Mr. SPECTER. At what point did the motorcade accelerate?

Mr. O'DONNELL. It accelerated, I would think, right about at the time that Agent Hill grabbed onto the back of the car, which would be just a few seconds after the last shot.

Mr. SPECTER. And at what speed did the motorcade proceed en route to the hospital?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Very rapidly. I would guess between 60 and 70 miles an hour.

Mr. SPECTER. About how long did it take for the motorcade to get to the hospital?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I would guess 5 to 10 minutes.

Mr. SPECTER. How far behind the President's car was the followup car in which you were riding at the time the President's car arrived at the hospital?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Right behind it, 5 or 6 feet.

Mr. SPECTER. What occurred at that time?

Mr. O'DONNELL. We got out of the car. David Powers got out of the car, went over to the President, and was not visible to me, and was crying, he laid on him. And then they came and took the President—that was the first time I really realized that Governor Connally had been badly hurt, as they also carried Governor Connally out.

Mr. SPECTER. What was Mrs. Kennedy doing at that time?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I believe somebody had helped her out and taken her into the hospital.

Mr. SPECTER. Was there a coat over President Kennedy at that time?

Mr. O'DONNELL. When they took him out, I was standing maybe 3 or 4 feet behind him. There was a wall of people between myself. I didn't see him, nor did I look.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you know who lifted the President out of the car?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you know who lifted the Governor out of the car?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't.

Mr. SPECTER. By what means were they taken away from the vicinity of the car?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I think they had stretchers. As I say, I was far enough back at that moment that they were milling around, and so many people between my vision and what they were doing, I did not see. I could not be accurate on that.

Mr. SPECTER. What did you do next, Mr. O'Donnell?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I went into the hospital and went right to Mrs. Kennedy. She was seated right outside the room where they had placed the President. I would say she was in a total daze, and as yet not knowing whether there was any hope or not.

Mr. SPECTER. What were your activities in the period of time immediately following that moment?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, I stayed with her for a few minutes, and then no one seemed to be able to get any conclusive answer as to the President's condition. As I said, I had seen the shots so clearly, I had a pretty clear view. The first thing I had done—I asked them to get a priest, which they did immediately. I went into the room. There were four or five doctors there. Dr. Burkley I think was there. And I said, "I think we better get a definite answer one way or another—is there any hope at all?" I was unable to get a conclusive answer. But I think I got the answer I needed.

I don't know how Mrs. Kennedy was finally told. I may have told her about at that moment. Between the time and the time I knew definitely, I went to see the Vice President.

Mr. SPECTER. Who was with him at that time?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Mrs. Johnson was with him and an agent who at the time I did not know. I believe it is Youngblood.

Mr. SPECTER. Where was Vice President Johnson?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He was in a room across the hall. You had to go directly across what would probably be the reception room, which was open to the public, and into another room. And I recollect I turned to my right, and he was over more or less in the corner with a screen. He was standing on the right, Mrs. Johnson, I believe, was sitting, the agent was standing at the door.

Mr. SPECTER. And what conversations, if any, did you have with then-Vice President Johnson?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I told him it looked very, very serious, and in my opinion that it was probably fatal. I hadn't been able to get a totally definite answer, but that I would let him know as soon as it was definite—but it looked pretty black.

I then left him. I don't recollect that he even commented. I left him and went back to Mrs. Kennedy, and within a very few minutes they confirmed the fact that the President was dead.

Mr. SPECTER. What did you do next?

Mr. O'DONNELL. As soon as I was assured that he was dead, and it was definite, I went back to the Vice President and informed him the President was dead, and that in my opinion he ought to get out of there as fast as he could. We had a general discussion. The President's first words to me were that we must look upon this in a sense that it might be a conspiracy of some nature, and that all security must be taken, and that we then discussed whether one of the possible movements might be to move the Presidential aircraft from Love Field to Carswell, where no route of departure could be laid out, and where there would be military security.

We discussed that. It was my opinion that his best movement was to move directly to Love Field. In fact, the routes would not be available anyway, because this was not a schedule—the departure from the hospital to the field would not be covered, if that were a possibility. And that it would be much better if he got to the field immediately, where he was under security and got aboard one of the aircraft.

Mr. SPECTER. Was there any discussion about his taking the presidential plane, AF-1, as opposed to AF-2?

Mr. O'DONNELL. There was not.

Mr. SPECTER. Did Vice President Johnson look to you in any way for a recommendation on his subsequent plans in terms of your being then in charge of the presidential party?

Mr. O'DONNELL. It was my impression that he did, that he, with the President gone—that he felt I was—had to assume a position of responsibility, both with regard to Mrs. Kennedy and as to himself. He asked me, as I recall—he asked me for my advice as to his departure and used the words, "I am in your hands now," at some point in the conversation.

But I did get the impression that he wanted official—that isn't the proper word—but that his movements should be approved by all concerned.

Mr. SPECTER. Have you now related all the conversation you had at that time with then-Vice President Johnson?

Mr. O'DONNELL. To the best of my recollection.

Mr. SPECTER. What did you do next, then?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Next after I left the Vice President, I went back to Mrs. Kennedy. On the way through the lobby I noted the newspapermen were clamoring for information. I met Kilduff. He said, "Should we announce it?" And I said I think that is a decision that can only be made by the President "You better ask him." So that was the last I saw of Kilduff.

Mr. SPECTER. Who is Kilduff?

Mr. O'DONNELL. He is the assistant press secretary.

Mr. SPECTER. Malcolm Kilduff?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Malcolm Kilduff.

I then went back to Mrs. Kennedy, who was in a very understandably distraught condition. It was my opinion—I tried to in some way imply that she might leave and come with us, at least to get her out of that room. She was covered with blood.

Mr. SPECTER. Which room was she in then?

Mr. O'DONNELL. She was in the same room. She had not moved. She was sitting near the door.

Mr. SPECTER. That is the room where the President was treated by the Dallas doctors?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Yes; there is a little corridor. There were swinging doors. He was inside the swing door. She was not in the presence of the body.

Mr. SPECTER. What was her response to you?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Her response to me was she would not leave her husband's body. At that point, I realized that she would not. The doctor had continually attempted to get her to take some form of sedation. And she had consistently refused, and told me she would not take anything, that she was going to stay with her husband.

I realized that she was going to stay with her husband, no matter what anybody did, and there was no possible way of in any way getting her to leave. And so, therefore, the only alternative I could see was that we move the President. It is an assumption I probably would have arrived at anyway, but I arrived at it in this manner.

So I went out and got hold of Dr. Burkley and General McHugh, and one of the agents, and Andy Berger, as I recall, and told them to get a casket, to bring it back, and Dr. Burkley would have the doctors prepare the body for removal, and that we would proceed to the airport and go to Washington.

This was done very rapidly, as I recollect. It seems to me it wasn't more than half an hour that they arrived with the casket. I remember just before they arrived I got Dave Powers and said there was a little room in the back that we ought to just take Mrs. Kennedy under some subterfuge, and talk to her in the room while we brought the casket in, because I thought that might be the final blow. And we did, and—but she knew what was going on. She came out and said, "No, I want to watch it all." And she stood in the doorway, and thanked us for our attempt at being compassionate.

And then they took it in, and put the body in the casket.

We were then all prepared to go. The agents told me the ambulance was ready, and they were prepared to move.

We—the casket was brought out about halfway, and a gentleman arrived who said that we would not be allowed to remove the body from the hospital until the necessary papers had been signed.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you know who he was?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't recollect who he was. I think he was—maybe from the coroner's office. My assumption is he would be.

But he took this position. We asked—I don't recollect who transmitted the message—that they speed this up as much as possible, and give us some idea how long it took to accomplish this. And they went out into this other little room where there were some telephones, and proceeded to call whoever it was necessary to call to get this permission.

We waited about 10 or 15 minutes, and Dr. Burkley and General McHugh were in the room, and Mr. O'Brien at some time. I went out again and asked them if they had an answer, and nobody seemed to be able to answer the question as to how long it might take, and whether it was a week or an hour.

So I was getting more concerned about Mrs. Kennedy's state all the time—although she appeared composed, as she had from the beginning.

Then a gentleman did arrive who has later been identified for me as a Judge Brown, who was on the telephone calling someone. It had been my assumption that upon his arrival that he had the power to permit us to depart. Dr. Burkley was talking to him in a very agitated manner. And the gentleman was very calm and cool and collected. If my recollection is clear, he said something to the effect that as of now this was just a homicide case, and there were certain things that had to be carried out, one of which I interpreted as an autopsy.

Mr. SPECTER. Who was it, Mr. O'Donnell, if you recall, who said this was just another homicide case?

Mr. O'DONNELL. My feeling is it was Brown, but I really would not be—in the excitement of the moment, the discussion of the autopsy, the signing of a certificate from the hospital, and the treatment of this as a homicide case, I would not want to be unfair and misinterpret who might have said it.

My recollection is it was indicated to us that the President is dead, the hospital has to perform certain functions, and the law must be met, no matter who it is, at this moment. In my own mind, when they said autopsy, I realized we were talking not about hours, but perhaps even days, which was an impossible situation for Mrs. Kennedy.

I talked to Dr. Burkley, and had him suggest to them that they could have a

doctor come with us, he could accompany the body at all times, and that we would bring him immediately to the Naval Hospital, and that they could perform whatever necessary chores, and there would be no separation physically from the hospital and the performance of their autopsy.

They refused to consider this.

I in my own mind determined that we had no alternative but to just depart. So I went back in the room. I told Mr. O'Brien, and whoever else was assembled there, that we were going to leave. I notified the Secret Service and General McHugh, and told them to get ready to depart. We went in and took the body out. Mrs. Kennedy stood right behind it, I think totally unaware of the problems that were then existing, so perhaps confused as to the speed with which we were attempting to depart.

We pushed the casket out through the hall. This first gentleman that had come in, who, I presume, was from the coroner's office, shouted very loudly, "You can't do that, you can't leave here now." Nobody paid any attention to him. We pushed out through another set of swinging doors. I remember a Catholic priest was between this and the doorway, and was praying. It was most disconcerting because we were concerned at all times that some moment they would say stop, and I hated to think what might happen to Mrs. Kennedy if she had to go back and go through this all over again. So we brushed them all aside and came out the same way we had come in, through the same doors.

There was an ambulance there. Andy Berger was seated in the driver's seat. Several agents were there. The body was put into the ambulance, Mrs. Kennedy got in with it. We climbed into a car alongside of it, and we took off for the airport. I told the agents if they would signal ahead, that there were agents at the airfield, and that as soon as we came through the gate, they were to close the gate and let nobody else in.

Mr. SPECTER. That is the gate at the airfield?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Yes.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you recall approximately what time you left the hospital?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I haven't the vaguest idea.

Mr. SPECTER. Would you have any idea how long it was after you arrived at the hospital that you left the hospital?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I wouldn't—it was a couple of hours. But I wouldn't have any idea.

Mr. SPECTER. About how long did the trip take you from the hospital back to the airport?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I am guessing totally at time. I would think it seemed about 15 minutes. It wasn't a long period of time.

Mr. SPECTER. What occurred then?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The drive was uneventful. We went through the gate. We arrived at the Air Force—I didn't know whether it was 1 or 2, to be honest, until I saw the members of the crew. And they unloaded the casket. I remember they had a very, very difficult time getting it up, because of the narrowness of the ramp. It was very difficult for the Secret Service. It seemed at moments it might almost tumble; it was frightening.

We got on the plane. And the seats had been taken out on the left side, so they could lay the casket down. The casket was placed down. I told General McHugh to tell the pilot to take off.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you know whether or not President Johnson had been sworn in at that time?

Mr. O'DONNELL. At that time I didn't know President Johnson was on the plane. I did not know whether he had been. Subsequently I realized he had not been.

Mr. SPECTER. Was there any specific discussion, to your knowledge, or consideration, to your knowledge, of holding the Presidential plane until Mrs. Kennedy and President Kennedy's body arrived on that plane before departing for Washington?

Mr. O'DONNELL. There has been no discussion of that to my knowledge. Once the President—the Vice President left, I left him, I had not seen him again. I had been notified he had departed, I had been notified that he arrived, and that was the last I heard of it, until I got on the airplane.

Mr. SPECTER. What did you do next, after arriving on the airplane?

Mr. O'DONNELL. As I say, I told General McHugh to have the plane take off, still all of us under the assumption or apprehension that at some moment we either might not be granted clearance to take off, or that the hospital may have in some way gotten the police to intercept us—the difficulty of that to Mrs. Kennedy was incalculable. I was in a highly desperate strait to get that airplane in the air and back to Washington. As I say, I told General McHugh to tell the pilot to take off.

There was a delay of 2 or 3 minutes, and nothing happened. So I headed up for the cockpit myself, and I ran into McHugh in the meantime who said that President Johnson was aboard, and that he had ordered the pilot to delay, to hold up until he was sworn in. That was the first I knew he was aboard.

I would like to correct that. I must have known he was aboard, because I am sure he must have greeted Mrs. Kennedy as she came aboard. And he and Mrs. Johnson. But I don't have a clear recollection of that in my own mind.

Mr. SPECTER. Were you present when President Johnson was sworn in?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I was.

Mr. SPECTER. After you arrived back on AF-1, what did you do between that time and the time the plane was airborne?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Mrs. Johnson took Mrs. Kennedy into the President's room on *Air Force 1*. I remember she was reluctant to even go in there, but she persuaded her to. And—

Mr. SPECTER. Who was reluctant to go in?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Mrs. Kennedy. And I went up, and the President and I carried on a conversation, which, again my recollections might be hazy—that it had been brought to his attention that I had asked for the plane to take off, and that there was some difference of opinion between him and me. He said to me that he had called the Attorney General, and that the Attorney General had indicated that it was, if not mandatory, at least preferable that he be sworn in prior to the aircraft taking off. I didn't describe what I saw as the problems. I realized it was an inevitable delay. So I don't believe I commented on it. I just listened to him. We sat there.

I went up and talked to the pilot, to make sure they didn't let anybody on the plane, or put the ramps down for anybody, except the judge, under any circumstances. About 10 or 15 minutes later the judge arrived and the swearing in occurred.

Mr. SPECTER. How soon after the swearing in was the plane airborne, if you recall?

Mr. O'DONNELL. It was almost immediate—as soon as he was sworn in, the plane taxied out and took off.

Mr. SPECTER. On the return flight to Washington, where did you sit?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I sat with Mrs. Kennedy almost all the way. We came back—Mr. Powers, Mr. O'Brien, and I stayed in the back compartment. And then Mrs. Kennedy and I—I sat down with her, we sat that way all the way back. The President called me up on one or two occasions and asked me to stay up in the cabin, wanted to talk to me, but I felt I had to stay with Mrs. Kennedy. So I sat with her the whole trip.

Mr. SPECTER. What did you talk about?

Mr. O'DONNELL. We reminisced.

Mr. SPECTER. Did she have anything to eat on the trip back?

Mr. O'DONNELL. No; I think we both had a drink. I tried to get her to take a good strong drink. I had not much luck.

Mr. SPECTER. She drank part but not all?

Mr. O'DONNELL. As I recollect, she just wanted to talk. She talked all the way.

Mr. SPECTER. What did you do then after your arrival in Washington, D.C.? Or did you come back to Andrews Air Force Base?

Mr. O'DONNELL. We arrived at Andrews and meanwhile the Attorney General had been notified, the decision had been made that he would go to Bethesda.

Mr. SPECTER. Who made that decision, by the way?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Mrs. Kennedy.

Mr. SPECTER. That the autopsy should be performed?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't think she knew anything about an autopsy. The question is where the body went. We didn't tell her there was to be an autopsy. And the choice was Walter Reed or Bethesda. He being a Navy man, she picked Bethesda.

Mr. SPECTER. She chose Bethesda, as between Bethesda and Walter Reed?

Mr. O'DONNELL. She did.

Mr. SPECTER. Who made the decision there would be an autopsy, if you know?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't know who made the decision. I just think we all agreed—we arrived at Bethesda. The Attorney General was there. I think it was just our assumption that this was a necessary part.

Mr. SPECTER. How did you get from Andrews Air Force Base to Bethesda Naval Hospital?

Mr. O'DONNELL. By car.

Mr. SPECTER. About what time did you arrive at Andrews, if you recall?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't remember. It was dark. That is all I do recall.

Mr. SPECTER. About how long was the car trip from Andrews to Bethesda?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I would think 45 minutes.

Mr. SPECTER. And what did you do after your arrival at Bethesda?

Mr. O'DONNELL. When we arrived at Bethesda, we went immediately to some room, reception room, where the family was.

Mr. SPECTER. And how long did you stay there?

Mr. O'DONNELL. We stayed there, I would think, until 3 or 4 in the morning. We wanted to stay there until Mrs. Kennedy got back to the house.

We drove back to the White House with her.

Mr. SPECTER. At what time did you leave her at the White House?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I would think 4 or 5 in the morning.

Mr. SPECTER. After that, did you go home?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I did.

Mr. SPECTER. Who all was present with the family at Bethesda?

Mr. O'DONNELL. There was Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Powers—I don't recollect anybody else outside the family.

Mr. SPECTER. Who from the family was there?

Mr. O'DONNELL. As I remember, Jean Kennedy, the Attorney General and his wife, I think Pat and Eunice. There were some other people. Really there were two—there was one room inside, in which they were in, and there was one out in the reception.

Mr. SPECTER. What was on the balance of the itinerary in Texas after the planned luncheon at the Trade Mart at Dallas on November 22?

Mr. O'DONNELL. We were leaving Dallas and going to Austin, and Governor Connally had arranged one or two receptions, and then a large dinner in the evening, a fundraising dinner, and then the President was going to depart from there to the Vice President's ranch, and stay with them through Saturday, and then come back to Washington.

Mr. SPECTER. And was the estimated time of arrival at the LBJ Ranch about 10 p.m., on the evening of November 22?

Mr. O'DONNELL. That would be about right.

Mr. SPECTER. With the plan then being to depart for Washington on the 23d, Saturday?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Yes.

Mr. SPECTER. What was the President's attitude, in a general way, about Presidential protection—that is, President Kennedy's attitude about Presidential protection, Mr. O'Donnell?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, his general attitude was that the Secret Service—that there was no protection available to a President of a democracy such as the United States from a demented person who was willing to risk his own life; that if someone wanted to kill a President of the United States, who in a sense wears two hats—he is the leader of a political party as well as our Chief Executive—and by the nature of our system must mingle with crowds, must ride through our cities, and must expose himself to the American people—that the Secret Service would not be, other than the protection that they provide by the screening processes prior to the actual carrying out of a political trip—would not be able to guarantee 100 percent protection, considering one has to mingle with

crowds of 50,000 or 100,000 people, and mingle with them at handshaking distance.

Mr. SPECTER. Had you ever discussed the dangers inherent in a motorcade, for example, with the President?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Not specifically in a motorcade. I don't think the President's view was—very frankly, we had discussed this general subject. We used to go on trips, and sit around in the evening and this would come up.

Mr. SPECTER. What was the President's view expressed during those conversations?

Mr. O'DONNELL. His view was that a demented person who was willing to sacrifice his own life could take the President's life. And that if it were to happen, I think his general view was it would happen in a crowded situation. I don't think it entered his mind that it might happen in the fashion as of a motorcade.

Mr. SPECTER. What was his reaction to that risk?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I think he felt that was a risk which one assuming the office of the Presidency of the United States inherited. It didn't disturb him at all.

Mr. SPECTER. When was the last conversation that you had with him on that general topic?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The last conversation I had with him on that general topic was the morning of the assassination.

Mr. SPECTER. Where did the conversation occur?

Mr. O'DONNELL. The conversation took place in his room, with Mrs. Kennedy and myself, perhaps a half hour before he left the Hotel Texas to depart for Carswell Air Force Base.

Mr. SPECTER. That was in Fort Worth?

Mr. O'DONNELL. That was in Fort Worth.

Mr. SPECTER. And tell us, as nearly as you can recollect, exactly what he said at that time, please.

Mr. O'DONNELL. Well, as near as I can recollect he was commenting to his wife on the function of the Secret Service, and his interpretation of their role once the trip had commenced, in that their main function was to protect him from crowds, and to see that an unruly or sometimes an overexcited crowd did not generate into a riot, at which the President of the United States could be injured. But he said that 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 a high building some day with a telescopic rifle, and there was nothing anybody could do to defend against such an attempt on the President's life.

Mr. SPECTER. What was Mrs. Kennedy's reaction to that philosophy?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I think—I think she had not quite thought of this at all. She certainly had not thought of it in this way. But I think the general tenor of the conversation was that she agreed that this was—in this democracy, this is inherent.

Mr. SPECTER. What had her reaction been to the trip to Texas up to that point?

Mr. O'DONNELL. She had enjoyed it. She had not been a girl who had loved campaigning. And I thought at the moment, at that very minute, that for the first time—the President and I were discussing a forthcoming trip to the west coast, and he had asked her if she would come, and she said she would be delighted to come, and she would like to go from now on.

The President was delighted. We were all delighted.

Mr. SPECTER. Had she been on any political trip before this trip to Texas?

Mr. O'DONNELL. No; she had not been on a political trip with us for quite awhile.

Mr. SPECTER. When was the trip immediately prior to the one to Texas that she was last on, if you recall?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I don't recall. I don't recall.

Mr. SPECTER. Was it during the 1960 campaign?

Mr. O'DONNELL. She was pregnant, as I recollect, during the 1960 campaign. She had been pregnant just prior to this. So that—and most of the other trips had been really the sort of thing that was difficult for Mrs. Kennedy to go on. But she had never evidenced to me quite as much interest in going on a—continuing to go on these trips, as she was after this.

Mr. SPECTER. Had she ever been to Texas prior to November 21, 1963?

Mr. O'DONNELL. Not to my recollection.

Mr. SPECTER. After the assassination, has she ever made any comment to you about that conversation which you had in the Hotel Texas in Fort Worth on the morning of November 22?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I have never dared bring that conversation up to Mrs. Kennedy.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. O'Donnell, do you have any knowledge, aside from the factors which you have set forth during your testimony today, concerning anyone involved in the shooting of the President?

Mr. O'DONNELL. No; I have no comment.

Mr. SPECTER. You say you have no knowledge?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I have no knowledge.

Mr. SPECTER. Do you have anything to add which you think would be helpful to the President's Commission in any way in its job of investigating all factors relating to the assassination of President Kennedy?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I do not.

Mr. SPECTER. One other detail, Mr. O'Donnell.

Did you have occasion to deal with an particular individuals from the city of Dallas itself during this trip, or in preparation for this trip?

Mr. O'DONNELL. No.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. O'Donnell, under our practice, if you care to, we can make this transcript available to you to read and to sign.

Would you prefer that, or would you just as soon waive the signature, and have the transcript in its final form as it comes from the court reporter here?

Mr. O'DONNELL. I would like to read it.

Mr. SPECTER. Fine. We will make it available to you for reading and signature, sir. Thank you very much.

TESTIMONY OF LAWRENCE F. O'BRIEN

The testimony of Lawrence F. O'Brien was taken at 11 a.m., on May 26, 1964, at the White House Office, Washington, D.C., by Mr. Francis W. H. Adams, assistant counsel of the President's Commission.

Mr. ADAMS. Raise your right hand, please.

Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you shall give in this deposition proceeding before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. O'BRIEN. I do.

Mr. ADAMS. Mr. O'Brien, the purpose of this deposition is to get from you your knowledge of the facts surrounding the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963.

I would like to start way back, if I may, at the point of the conception of the trip, the origin of the trip. How far back was that before November 22?

Mr. O'BRIEN. My recollection is the contemplation of the trip to Texas was back some, perhaps, months before the actual trip.

However, I should quickly add that many discussions took place about potential trips to all parts of the country at some future time, to some degree in the political context. The President, No. 1, enjoyed getting out to meet the people; and, secondly, over a period of time we had anticipated the President would travel rather extensively when the opportunity presented itself. But the difficulty in pinning anything like that down specifically in advance is the obvious difficulty of scheduling any travel by the President, because of the duties of the office and the obvious day to day changes in the problem.

Mr. ADAMS. But you, yourself, were concerned and involved in discussions looking towards this?

Mr. O'BRIEN. Yes; Mr. O'Donnell was responsible for the handling of the spe-