

1963: Kennedy Assassination. On the morning of November 22, forty-six-year-old President John F. Kennedy was en route from Fort Worth to Dallas, Texas, aboard Air Force One. It was his first visit to Texas, a politically influential state, since winning the 1960 presidential election. During the brief flight, he worked on the speech he planned to deliver following a ten-mile presidential motorcade through the city.

Meanwhile, an ex-marine sharpshooter who had once attempted to defect to Russia was also preparing for Kennedy's motorcade. Lee Harvey Oswald, twenty-four years old, was working as a filing clerk at the Texas School Book Depository, located in downtown Dallas along what would be the route of Kennedy's motorcade. Oswald had been affiliated with a number of left-wing causes, including a pro-Castro group, and this morning arrived for work carrying a package wrapped inconspicuously in brown paper. Inside was a disassembled high-powered rifle, complete with telescopic sight.

Later that morning, Oswald made his way to the depository's sixth floor. There he rearranged cardboard cartons to create a spot where he would be hidden from view but would still have a clear line of sight on the passing motorcade.

The motorcade got under way at 11:55 A.M., moving slowly through the Dallas streets. Kennedy's limousine, a large blue Lincoln Continental convertible, was wide open to the sunny Dallas weather; a protective clear plastic bubble had been brought in case of rainy weather, but was not needed. The Kennedy car was preceded and followed by numerous other vehicles in the motorcade, including police motorcycle escorts and cars filled with security people, politicians, and journalists. Texas Governor John Connally and his wife enjoyed the honor of riding with the president and Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy.

Increasingly large crowds of cheering spectators greeted the motorcade as it approached the center of Dallas. People stood twelve-deep on the sidewalks while others cheered and waved from open windows. At times people pushed onto the street to get a better look, forcing the motorcade to an even slower pace. Twice the president angered his Secret Service agents by stopping to shake hands with children along the way.

While workers at the book depository left for lunch or to get a look at the president, Oswald slipped away to his sixth-floor vantage point to wait for the motorcade to approach. There he assembled the rifle, loaded it, and took aim at the street below.

It was 12:30 when the motorcade passed the book depository and turned left, traveling at barely eleven miles per hour. Cheering crowds prompted the governor's wife, Nellie, to remark, "You surely can't say Dallas doesn't love you, Mr. President." Smiling, Kennedy responded, "No, you can't."

Kennedy had just raised his arm to wave when suddenly rifle shots rang out from the building above. The first bullet penetrated the back of the president's neck and passed through him to

hit Connally, who was injured in the ribs, lung, and wrist. The president grabbed his throat just as the second bullet hit, tearing away the back of his skull. Jacqueline Kennedy screamed, "Oh, no!" just as he fell, lifeless, into her lap.

A bodyguard instantly pulled Mrs. Kennedy down and shielded her from further gunfire as the car sped away, leaving the confused and hysterical onlookers behind. At Parkland Memorial Hospital, doctors tried vainly to save the president, giving him transfusions, oxygen, and anesthesia, but it was too late. At 1:00 P.M. he was declared dead.

Dallas police quickly discovered the rifle and ammunition clip that Oswald had left behind and obtained a description of him from witnesses. Oswald was arrested within two hours, but not before he shot and killed a policeman who had tried to stop him for questioning.

Oswald was charged with the two murders, but he did not live to stand trial. Two days later, as Oswald was being transferred to the county jail, a Dallas nightclub owner named Jack Ruby stepped from the crowd and shot him dead. Oswald's murder only added to speculations about the tragic assassination of Kennedy, which, despite various rumors of plots and escaped accomplices, the Warren Commission finally ascribed to Oswald alone. In the 1980s, however, reports surfaced indicating the assassination may have been engineered by Cuban leader Fidel Castro, reportedly in retaliation for a failed U.S.-backed attempt on his life.