

# THE WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH COMPANY

GULF DIVISION

1416 COMMERCE ST.

DALLAS 1, TEXAS

W. W. SEMINGSSEN  
VICE PRESIDENT

November 27, 1963

## PERSONAL

Mr. Paul:

There is nothing deader than stale news, but nevertheless I thought you might like to have a personal report from me on the President's assassination, since it occurred in this now grief stricken city. There is not much that I can add to the myriad of newspaper accounts, except to relate our activities during the President's visit.

On Thursday I checked with Larry Wilcox to confirm that all arrangements had been set up here to handle the press. Everything was in order; also everything went smoothly at San Antonio, Houston and Fort Worth.

Larry had arranged for a signed company car with Sales Manager R. C. Johnson and Sales Representative Yates to meet the White House press plane at Love Field airport and to contact Carroll Linkins immediately on arrival. Motor messengers were on hand to pick up any press file to take to the Mart, where the Press Center had been set up - about five miles from the airport. The Company car and its occupants were cleared to accompany the motorcade on the 45-minute trip to downtown Dallas, thence to the Mart on Stemmons Freeway. The company car was about 7th in line in the motorcade, preceded by one White House press bus and followed by another.

Having been with Carroll Linkins on President Eisenhower's three separate visits to Acapulco, Falcon Dam and Del Rio, and on President Kennedy's trip to Mexico City

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last year, I had planned to meet him at the Mart press center to assist in whatever way I could and expressly to bid Linkins farewell, as I knew he would be retiring early next year and that this perhaps would be his last trip to the Gulf Division.

Friday morning I had been talking with Dan Hesen, Bartley and Kosterlin about some Mexico matters that came up rather suddenly, and at 10:30AM when I was scheduled to meet Larry in front of our building, I hastened to break the telephone conversation and my parting words to Dan were, "I am off to meet the Presidential Party and will give them all your regards".

It had rained some Thursday and there was still a drizzle up until about 10:30AM Friday, when the sky cleared and the sun shone brightly. According to news reports it was for this reason that a last minute decision was made at the airport to remove the bullet proof dome of the President's car during the motorcade to the Mart.

We have had a very serious drought in Texas and on the way to the Mart I made the comment that surely President Kennedy would make some remarks in his greeting about bringing the much needed rains to Texas.

On driving to the Mart about five miles distant from our office, we took the same route to be taken by the motorcade, picking up at Houston and Main, turning left to go under the underpass at Houston and the Expressway. Crowds were then gathering along the route - and many families were in the small park area leading down to the under pass route. Police and security officers were located on the sidelines and on top of the overpass. Ironically, the County Court House and Jail are on the S.E. corner of Houston and Elm, facing the small park area. The building from which the

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President was shot is on the N.W. corner.

Larry and I arrived at the Mart shortly before 11A. We went directly by escalator (no elevators) to the fourth floor terrace where the press center was located. The terraces are on each of the floors surrounding the inner part of the building where the luncheon reception was to be held - so that from any terrace there was a clear view of the main floor. Only those with invitations or security clearances were permitted on the main floor or terraces above.

Our arrangements at the press center were quite adequate and the operators began arriving at 11:30AM. Some local press correspondents had arrived in advance - a few stories were filed. Larry and I greeted the advance correspondents and orientated them on the set up.

I checked with the security officer in charge, asking about luncheon arrangements for the White House correspondents - some would be given specified seating at a table on the fringe near the dais, others would be on their own and for those coffee and sandwiches were to be provided in the press center.

I also checked with the security officer as to the point of entry of the official party and White House press correspondents so as to be on hand to meet Link on the main floor at the right entrance. Some of the White House correspondents had left the party at Fort Worth and were at the Mart in advance.

The official party was due at the Mart at 12:30P but there was the usual delay at the airport and enroute as the President greeted various groups. By radio reports, his estimated arrival at the Mart would be about 12:40P. The President was shot at approximately 12:30P, about three miles from the Mart. From that time on until arrival of our company car ahead of the press bus there was a blackout of any news. Sales Manager Johnson and SE Yates were the first

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to arrive at the Mart. They had left the motorcade near the Mart and had taken a short cut to the entrance. I inquired of Link and was told he was following in the press bus. It was then that Johnson and Yates told me that something had happened near the underpass and that the President's car had sped ahead. The company car was about 7th in line, or a block behind the lead car. It was turning on to Houston Street from Main Street when the first shots were heard. Yates heard what sounded like three firecrackers which might have been thrown off the overpass, and they knew that something had happened as security service agents and police were swarming about. At that time I spotted Link. He knew that something had happened but was not certain what it was. He and the White House correspondents were in the White House press bus, which is practically sound proof and air conditioned so that they could not hear or see what was going on ahead. There was a mad scramble among correspondents to find out what had happened. I reported what I had heard and about that time announcement was made on the radio that the President had been shot and had been taken to Parkland Hospital, about three miles from the Mart. Link immediately reported this on the printer to Washington.

The pool press car with Merriam Smith, UPI, and Frank Cormier, AP, followed the President's car to the hospital and had reported the incident by radio phone from the car enroute.

The White House press busses immediately took off from the Mart for Parkland Hospital. Link and I and others followed the press busses in the company car with police escort. We arrived at the hospital near 1PM, at the time of the President's death. Only the pool correspondents, Assistant Press Secretary Malcolm Kilduff and Ed Fauver of the White House communications staff were able to be on the emergency operating floor. All others had to await a press briefing by Kilduff. Meanwhile a press center was set up at the hospital in a class room, and it was every man for

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himself to gather news as best he could. All telephones at the hospital were commandeered by the press and others. Through the assistance of kindly but shocked hospital administrative assistant, I was placed at a telephone in a private office while she went to the switchboard and had the telephone crew who were now on hand cut through a line for me. I could not get through to the Mart, but reached my Secretary, Mrs. Hoover, and gave her instructions to pass on to Area Plant Superintendent Peeler and Larry Wilcox at the Mart about setting up direct circuits at the hospital to the extent available. City Plant Supervisor Collier was on hand. Equipment had been rushed out, but circuits were not yet available. Larry had made arrangements for this before Link and I left for the hospital. We had some difficulty in getting the Telephone foreman to assign circuits. I was able to get in touch with Mr. Peeler, he contacted telephone officials to give us priority on a number of circuits for press handling. We were then able to get the circuits operative. Meanwhile, I was able to get Link through on a long distance connection to District Manager Thrig at Washington.

It was not until 1:35 P that Assistant Press Secretary Malcolm Kilduff tearfully gave the first briefing to the White House correspondents announcing the President's death at the hospital at approximately 1 PM. Many questions were asked by the correspondents about the departure of Mrs. Kennedy, the President's body, and the new President - when he would be sworn in etc. Announcement was made of the return to Washington of Mrs. Kennedy, the President's body, but the departure of President Johnson and the swearing in of him were not revealed. President Johnson's departure from the hospital was under heavy secret service guard.

During the briefing sessions, the White House correspondents insisted on being with the new President and shortly thereafter word of his departure with Mrs. Kennedy and the President's body was revealed.

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At that point, Link and I and others accompanied the White House press correspondents to the airport. The President's plane was departing on our arrival and shortly thereafter a second briefing was given to the press. The pool press accompanied the President's plane to Washington at 2:45 PM.

The remaining White House correspondents requested Ed Fauver to lay over until 5 P.M. so they could write their stories. They were written on the plane and on the White House press busses on the airport field. Link gathered the press files which were motored to the press center at the Mart at ten minute intervals. During the layover of the press plane, I made a trip back to the hospital and to the Mart where everything was under control.

I returned to the airport, picked up the remaining press file, obtained a list of the correspondents who were remaining in Dallas - at Link's suggestions - so that our people could contact them throughout the evening and the following day. The press plane took off at 5 PM and I waved goodbye to Link.

We cleaned up at the Mart press center at about 7 PM, the remaining and subsequent press files were handled from the main office. Larry and I returned to the office, released the standby personnel and then left for home about 9 PM.

It was a long, eventful and sorrowful day, and only after a welcome repose at home did the full impact of the events begin to register.

This report has been hurriedly written in narrative form and for understandable reasons is principally in the first person. However, with me at all times were either Larry, Sales Manager Johnson, Operations Manager Glasser

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Sales Representative Yates, and others, all of whom performed unusual services and whom I have extended appreciation and thanks for their outstanding contribution.

And, finally I cannot say sufficient in praise and commendation for the stellar performance of that "Old Pro", Carroll Linkins, who under terrific pressure, if not utter pandemonium, called the turns correctly; where to be, where to go, and what to do at the right time. Link, I understand, may be retiring in February. He will be a great loss to us in the upcoming presidential election year.

I have not included in this report details on the volume of press handled. These data have been given in separate wire reports to your office. I am happy to say that there have been no complaints of service to my knowledge.

/s/ W. W. Semingsen

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