

# NOVEMBER 22, 1963

## St Cecilia's Day



The President, always of a fatalistic turn of mind, was increasingly preoccupied with matters of mortality. He spoke often about the assassination of Lincoln, and taught his infant daughter, Caroline, a poem by Alan Seeger, an American killed in World War I. It began, “I have a rendezvous with death...”

“... But I've a rendezvous with Death  
At midnight in some flaming town,  
When Spring trips north again this year,  
And I to my pledged word am true,  
I shall not fail that rendezvous.”

So here Jack Kennedy was, dressing, on a cold, wet morning in Fort Worth, Texas, in a suite filled with borrowed works of art, remarking to Jackie and Ken O'Donnell how, “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 on a high building some day with a telescopic rifle...”

How tired they must all have felt. Tired, partially, because they had been treated so well. Applauded, over expensive plates of bland

food, as the president spoke of substantial increases in military expenditure, of economic growth, of the mission to the Moon and its multiple benefits to the great, Democratic state of Texas. The president and the first lady had been made welcome. There were no hostile, demented crowds, no spitting, placard-waving Birchers. The Texas trip had gone swimmingly so far. But next up was Dallas, and that was something else.

The *Dallas Morning News* carried a full-page, black-bordered ad, welcoming the president and asking him 12 loaded questions. Why was Latin America turning “either anti-American or Communistic”? Why was he selling wheat to the Russians and drinking toasts with Tito? Why had he scrapped the Monroe Doctrine “in favor of the Spirit of Moscow?” It was a Bircher diatribe, paid for by Dallas oil men. The president glanced at the ad and put the paper down. “We’re heading into nut country today,” he said.

Lee Oswald caught a ride to work from Wesley Frazier. Before he left the Paines’ house, he placed his wedding ring and (according to some reports) his wallet on the bedroom table. He reached the Book Depository at eight.<sup>1</sup>

Dallas was the heart of Texas oil country. It was a hard city in a harsh landscape: 20 percent black, entirely un-integrated. But Dallas was also the fastest-growing city in the United States, with the greatest boom in office building anywhere outside New York. H.E. Chiles, one of the petroleum millionaires of neighboring Midland, described their world thus:

“I love this place. There aren’t more than thirty days in a year when we can’t play golf here. Of course, that means we’re sometimes playing in a twenty-mile-an-hour wind, but we’re out there...

“We’re on the desert. We might as well face it, and we do. All our windows are weather-stripped. We build walls to keep the sand out. And when the sand is blowing, we stay indoors, just like the goddam Arabs.”<sup>2</sup>

Such conditions did not breed political moderates. H.L. Hunt funded numerous extreme-right groups, and had stepped up the attack against the Kennedys when their tax-exempt status was challenged. Hunt’s *Life Line* radio broadcasts excoriated the president, accusing

him of being a communist and calling for acts of "extreme patriotism." Big Clint Murchison was said to have financed the American Nazi Party: his favorite watering hole was a millionaires' hunting lodge with five artificial lakes—the Koon Kreek Klub. Showing similar taste, Fort Worth oil men wined and dined in a private, whites-only restaurant called the Blackamoor Room. Alongside such brutishness, the Texas rich showed an unquenchable thirst for European culture in the form of Impressionist paintings and Surrealist works by Magritte and Dalí. The art which so beautifully adorned the Kennedys' walls that morning might be seen as a product of cultural anxiety on the part of the recently rich, but it was also an investment.

The Texas super-rich bought art the same way as they reinvested their millions in politics and politicians: they were ambitious, and keen to diversify. An oil magnate might buy a Manet or a Monet and he might take out an advertisement in the newspaper, to "welcome the president." The newspaper ad was not the only document attacking Kennedy that day. There was the handbill (or was it a circular? or a "pamplet"?) which Hosty had warned the Dallas Secret Service about, declaring Kennedy WANTED FOR TREASON. Like the "Welcome Mr. Kennedy" ad, it featured an itemized list of the president's crimes.

The newspaper ad was put together by a group calling itself Conservatism, USA. CUSA was a small group of young Army enlisted men, who had been based in Munich, Germany. Under the influence of their then commander, General Walker, these former "Screaming Eagles" had vowed to resist communism both in Europe and on their return to the United States. The head of CUSA, Laurie Schmidt, had based himself in Dallas, where his brother was, like Scotty Duff, a handyman and chauffeur for the general. After the riot against Stevenson, Schmidt had managed to convince reporters that CUSA was running the conservative resistance; on the basis of this he persuaded two former Munich buddies, Bernard Weissman and William Burley, to join him in Dallas, finding them work as carpet salesmen. Weissman sold no carpets, but he was given the cash for the ad—\$1,462—by Joe Grinnon, a Bircher who collected it from Nelson Bunker Hunt and two other oil men, Edgar R. Crissey and H.R. "Bum" Bright. Weissman was persuaded to put his name on the ad, along with a fictitious group, the American Fact-Finding

Committee. (Weissman and Burley quit their jobs and left Dallas a few days after the assassination.)<sup>3</sup>

The WANTED FOR TREASON handbill was the work of Robert Surrey, General Walker's Nazi associate and Agent Hosty's bridge partner. (Surrey and Walker were partners in the American Eagle Publishing Co., which, in January 1964, produced a booklet of clippings from the two Dallas newspapers, entitled *The Assassination Story*.) Surrey, whom the Warren Report described as "a 38-year-old printing salesman," ordered 5,000 of the TREASON flyers from a printer named Robert Krause. He refused to answer any of the Commissioners' questions regarding his handbill, or say who paid for it or who distributed it, pleading the Fifth Amendment.<sup>4</sup>

Why Chief Justice Warren treated this Nazi provocateur with such kid gloves is hard to say. Perhaps because the element common to Surrey's handbill and CUSA's newspaper ad was General Walker, whose particular concerns are evident in both: the handbill complains about Kennedy's support for "communist-inspired racial riots" and claims he "illegally invaded a sovereign state [Mississippi?] with federal troops"; while the newspaper ad questions the president's suppression of right-wing propaganda at U.S. military bases.

Richard Nixon left Dallas at 9:05 a.m., aboard American Airlines Flight 82, bound for New York.

At 9:45, some 200 city and county police officers gathered at the Trade Mart for the day's detail. Sheriff Bill Decker instructed his deputies that they were to be spectators along the motorcade route, and to "take no part in security."

In Fort Worth, Jack Kennedy spoke to a group of businessmen over breakfast. Jackie was late, and the president joked about it, assuring his guests that she was worth the wait. At 10:30 his party left the Texas Hotel for Carswell AFB. Around that time the FBI informant, William Somerset, received a call from Joseph Milteer, who was now in Dallas. Milteer told him that Kennedy would soon be there, and would not be visiting Miami again, then hung up the phone.

FBI agent Hosty had a morning meeting with an IRS agent, Frank Ellsworth, and Edward Coyle, of the 112th Military Intelligence Group—part of the Fourth U.S. Army Division at Fort Sam Houston, which had defied the president with its anticommunist call-to-arms. The meeting took place in Ellsworth's office. On the agenda was the ongoing theft of weapons from Fort Hood. Ellsworth was also

running an ATTD investigation into illegal arms traffic in Dallas. His undercover operation to entrap the Minuteman arms dealer, Thomas Masen, had collapsed three days before, when the DPD interrupted an illegal arms deal in which Masen was involved. His cover blown, Ellsworth arrested Masen on lesser charges. He told the Warren Commission,

“An organization known as the Minutemen is the right-wing group most likely to have been associated with any effort to assassinate the president... The Minutemen are closely tied to General Walker and H.L. Hunt.”<sup>5</sup>

There's an obvious parallel between Oswald's recent activities—associating with right-wing groups and illegally purchasing firearms—and those of IRS agent Ellsworth, and of the Minuteman Masen. Ellsworth later told author Dick Russell that Masen was an Oswald “lookalike,” and that he believed Masen had impersonated Lee at the Sports Drome Rifle Range.<sup>6</sup>

At 11:03, six members of the cabinet departed Honolulu for further meetings in Japan. Minutes later, Air Force One left Carswell on the short flight to Dallas Love Field, landing at 11:35. As many as 4,000 people were waiting to greet the Kennedys. The first lady was presented with a bouquet of red roses—a strange gift in Texas, where the yellow rose is traditionally preferred. There was a brief reception, much handshaking, and then it was time for Jack and Jackie to join Governor and Mrs. Connally in the limousine. The motorcade departed at 11:50. It was meant to last 40 minutes, and to deposit the president and party at the Trade Mart, where lunch and another speech were planned.

The Kennedys were looking at another busy day of political glad-handing. At 12:30 Jack was scheduled to address the Dallas Citizens Council at the Trade Mart. At 2 p.m. he and Jackie were to leave the Trade Mart for Love Field. At 2:30 Air Force One would take them to Bergstrom Air Force Base. Arriving at 3:15, the president and first lady were to travel, in convoy, to the Commodore Perry Hotel in Austin. An hour later, at 4:15, they would attend a reception given by the Texas State Democratic Committee. At 6 p.m. the Kennedys would leave the hotel for the Governor's Mansion, and a reception with the Connallys. They were scheduled to return to the hotel at 6:45.