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When the News Went Live: Dallas 1963 (review)

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Life on a flying training base during the war was not easy for either military or civilian workers, and the threat of sudden death from an aircraft accident loomed large. The reader can feel the frustrations of Capt. Charles TenHouten, the post medical officer, who found himself with 620,000 pounds of medical supplies but no place to put them and no hospital in which to use them. The author is equally adept at making the story of base construction hum like the engines of the bombers assigned to Pyote as he is in making the intricate procedures involved in "cocooning" airplanes (p. 165), keeping them safely wrapped for possible future use, interesting for the layperson. Alexander also explores the myths and realities surrounding the most famous of Pyote's residents, the *Enola Gay*, the B-29 used to drop the first atomic bomb on Japan in August 1945. Late in the plane's life, it was stored at the base before being flown to Washington, D.C., for display at a Smithsonian Institution facility. And, of course, there are the rattlesnakes, for which the base got its nickname.

With *The One and Only Rattlesnake Bomber Base* under his belt, I hope the author will begin a series of studies enlarging the chapter-length histories of air force bases in his first two books. Histories that encompass all aspects of base and community life, such as this, are much needed.

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BRUCE ASHCROFT

When the News Went Live: Dallas 1963. By Bob Huffaker, Bill Mercer, George Phenix, and Wes Wise. Foreword by Dan Rather. (Lanham, Md.: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004. Pp. 224. Dedication, acknowledgments, foreword, preface, photographs, afterword, index. ISBN 1589791398. \$24.95, cloth.)

When the News Went Live: Dallas 1963 retells the story of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the chaos that still surrounds that event. The book is a series of recollections by four men—Bob Huffaker, Bill Mercer, George Phenix, and Wes Wise—who as employees of KRLD, the Dallas CBS television and radio affiliate witnessed first hand the troubling minutes, hours, and days immediately after Kennedy's murder. To a generation of Americans accustomed to accessing the news via radio, on November 22, 1963, the news literally went live, as television bonded the nation as witness to its own history.

Bob Huffaker broadcast live from the parking lot of Parkland Hospital, where Kennedy was taken. In exacting detail he analyzes the route that Oswald used to flee the now infamous sixth-story window in the Book Depository Building, focusing on Oswald's brutal execution of Dallas police officer J. D. Tippett and his subsequent apprehension in a downtown theatre by Dallas detectives. Huffaker describes the police's attempt to satisfy the news media, even granting reporters access to the basement of the police building when Oswald was to be transferred to the Tarrant County Jail the following morning. It was there that local nightclub owner Jack Ruby, overwhelmed with grief over the Kennedy assassination and fueled by a diet of Preludin and Benzedrine, shot and killed Oswald on live television (p. 51). Huffaker also reported on the trial and subsequent January 1, 1967, death of Jack Ruby from cancer.

George Phenix remembers the volatile political climate of Dallas. On assignment one week before Kennedy's shooting while covering Alabama Gov. George Wallace's speech before approximately two thousand right-wingers at Dallas's Baker Hotel, Phenix was physically assaulted and twice thrown to the ground by the ultraconservative Gen. Edwin Walker. The conservative crowd robustly applauded Walker's efforts; no one yet knew that one month earlier Lee Harvey Oswald had attempted to assassinate Walker in his Dallas home.

Bill Mercer writes about the chaotic conditions at police headquarters after the capture of Lee Harvey Oswald, focusing on the impromptu midnight press conference with Oswald. Mercer acknowledges that among those in attendance at the press conference was Jack Ruby, who apparently had no trouble entering police headquarters, given the confused state of affairs. Mercer also covered the arrival at police headquarters of Oswald's wife, Marina, and his mother, Marguerite, who steadfastly proclaimed her son's innocence.

Wes Wise focuses on the political instability of Dallas, recounting the October 1963 visit of former Senator and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson, who was accosted by several conservative, anti-U.N. protestors. This event forced the Secret Service, FBI, and Dallas police to work hard to protect President Kennedy. Wise also reports that the day after the assassination he found Jack Ruby near the now famous "grassy knoll"; Ruby was despondent over the president's death and murmured his concerns about Jackie and the Kennedy children having to come to Dallas for Oswald's trial.

These four men do not attempt to "spin" a new interpretation, nor do they attempt to support or refute the various conspiracy charges surrounding the events of November 1963. In those terrible days they shared a common bond to report the news as they lived and witnessed it. Forty years later and still committed to the same principle, they offer the reader their observations. *When the News Went Live: Dallas 1963* is a fascinating text and one that every person of the generation that remembers the Kennedy assassination will enjoy reading.

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Warden: Prison Life and Death from the Inside Out. By Jim Willett and Ron Rozelle. (Albany, Texas: Bright Sky Press, 2005. Pp. 232. Foreword, photographs, epilogue, acknowledgments. ISBN 1931721505. \$24.95, cloth.)

Huntsville's infamous prison has been chronicled by reporters, prisoners, and chaplains, but rarely by prison officials. In 1957, Texas Prison Director Lee Simmons published *Assignment Huntsville: Memoirs of a Texas Prison Official* (Austin: UT Press), which has been considered the classic account of the prison from an official's perspective. In *Warden: Prison Life and Death from the Inside Out*, Jim Willett becomes the first Huntsville warden to recount his life during the more than 150-year history of Huntsville Prison.

Willett experienced Huntsville as a student at Sam Houston State University and as a career corrections employee, and both experiences have informed this somewhat breezy account of his life behind prison walls. Willett's story