

convertible, and then quickly made for their own assigned positions in the motorcade. A yellow 1964 Chevrolet Impala convertible (license plate P1 9059) had been reserved for the "reel car" which was positioned just behind the Bell Telephone press pool car. The reel car, often referred to as "Camera Car 1," was the sixth vehicle behind the President, and the closest of any vehicles with photographers aboard. Convertibles were always the car of preference for photographers, as the camera people could stand up and shoot crowds and the motorcade over the windshield, and make a quick exit if an unscheduled stop proved photogenic. Craven recalls of parade spectators, "You look and see people oddly dressed or holding any signs. A lot of people try to run alongside and the police or Secret Service agents would jump off the follow-up car and stop them."³¹

Aboard the "reel car" Atkins got into the rear passenger side and Craven took the rear driver's side. In between them sat Wiegman's sound man, John Hoefen. At the Dallas stop the NBC sound cameras had not been scheduled to be taken off the plane, as the Trade Mart speech was to be handled by a separate NBC team. Explains Wiegman, "That was called 'hopscoching,' and we did that a lot. We might make a three-stop trip and we would cover that one which logistically we could get the sound equipment knocked down and back to the plane before 'The Man' left. And we'd do one of them maybe, and they would supplement with another crew in the area and hopscoch them. Our gear would be knocked down by the sound man and any help we could get. I would go in the motorcade and when I pulled up at the ensuing stop, the tripod would be right there and all I'd have to do is put the camera on the tripod, thread it up, and I'm ready to shoot. In Dallas Johnny didn't have an assignment, but he went along in the motorcade — fortunately."³²

In the front seat the driver was a hatted Texas Ranger while Wiegman positioned himself in the passenger seat, at times sitting on the door frame itself for a better filming position. Craven recalls the sixth occupant of the car was White House electrical technician Cleve Ryan. "There was just room in the car. Usually Cleve went ahead on the baggage truck with the White House transportation people and helped unload our gear. But there was room in the car and he rode with us. He was well known to everyone. I think Cleve was in the front seat." Ryan was a pool electrician who worked for and received a check from all the networks, as well as from other news agencies which chipped in when they used his services. Ryan had been called over to the F.D.R. White House during the earlier newsreel days when the need for a union electrician was realized. Originally from a stage production background, the genial Irishman who arrived at the White House sporting a derby hat and spats, had soon made his presence invaluable to the press, doing courier jobs and the like. As Wiegman points out, "Cleve knew where he was needed and made sure he was there."³³

With the motorcade off, all three movie makers scanned the crowds looking to take a few representative feet of activity. Still in the outskirts of downtown Dallas, Atkins shot a view of the motorcade vehicles in front of him, and clips of the crowd to his right, including someone with a homemade sign reading, "Howdy." Just after a brief glimpse of people in windows of buildings along the parade route, Atkins recognizes his

film was about depleted and wasted the last few feet of film. Now inserting his sixth reel of the day, Atkins squeezes off a few feet of waste film to check the camera mechanics and get into virgin film. The motorcade is now in the business district. At a right turn ahead, Atkins's lens just manages to catch Kennedy and his wife six cars ahead. Scenes of the downtown area with spectacular crowds and red, white, and blue bunting over the street make for some good shots. A telephoto shot of the motorcade going down a seeming cavern of lights and shadows created by the tall building, is followed by a backward shot of Camera Car 2, in which White House cameraman Cecil Stoughton can be picked out aiming his camera for a shot of the scene in front of him. Further down Main Street Atkins takes his last shot of the motorcade sequence showing kids waving, and he pans back towards them.³⁴ Both Craven and Wiegman had taken similar sequences of the large and energetic downtown crowd.

Atkins describes what next transpired. "We came to the end of [Main Street] and made that right-hand turn, and were going directly at the [Texas School Book] Depository. Just as we turned, I remember looking at my watch, and it was 12:30, and just as I looked at my watch I heard an explosion. The thought that ran through my mind, 'Oh, brother — somebody lit a cherry bomb. I bet the Secret Service are jumping out of their britches.' And then immediately following there were two more quick explosions, and my stomach just went into a knot. The explosions were very loud, like they were right in front of me."

Craven was also sitting in the back seat. "It was just as we were making the turn. We thought it was a motorcycle backfiring. There were motorcycles abreast of cars, riding in the motorcade. It was stop and go, and those things backfire quite frequently. Somebody, I think, casually said, 'Jeez — that sounds like shooting or shots,' — and none of us really knew." Events transpired quickly. Atkins says concerning the three shots he remembers hearing, "You know when kids play cowboys and Indians and they go Bam — Bam Bam! The last two [shots] clustered together." Craven believes he heard three shots, but adds, "To tell the truth, I wouldn't be really positive. I could have sworn they were backfires."³⁵

Seated in the front right side of the car, NBC Cameraman Wiegman's instincts were finely tuned that day. His recollections of his activities were spoken about 25 years later.

We were in that straight-a-way heading down to what I now know as the Book Depository, and I heard the first report and I



Atkins turns around and films Camera Car 2. Art Rickerby is in a light coat and Cecil Stoughton (at right) is raising his camera.