

News That 'Couldn't be True'

By PAUL CONTESSABLE
Courier Associate Editor

"We interrupt this program for an urgent bulletin. An assignment had brought me near my home and I was sitting before the television enjoying a late lunch hour.

"Several bursts of gunfire have been fired toward the car carrying President Kennedy and the Governor of Texas as they were riding in a motorcade down the streets of Dallas."

THE THOUGHTS that flew through my mind in those fleeting seconds must have been in the hundreds. It couldn't be true! It was true, they must have missed their mark. Who could do such a thing? It could not be true!

"The seriousness of the injuries to the President are unknown but they may be fatal."

The feeling that ran through my mind and body cannot be explained in words but I am sure it is a feeling felt by millions throughout the country and throughout the world. It can't be! The lightness came to my throat and to my stomach. My eyes felt glassy.

Television went back to its regular program but for only a matter of seconds. I myself saw nothing. Again a news bulletin came on... this time to stay.

Reports were coming in fast now... many of them contradicting previous announcements. "The President was seen slumped forward in the car... at least two wounds were seen in the chest of Governor Connally... an eyewitness reported that President Kennedy's lips were moving as he was being carried into the hospital as if talking normally."

A PRAYER went up intermingled with the thoughts that flashed through my mind. He

must be okay! This couldn't happen! Anxiously I waited along with millions of others for word that the President was okay. Perhaps... maybe... flesh wound. That's all! That must be all!

The minutes passed like hours. No, I kept thinking to myself, no, no, no. He's alive and will recover quickly and completely.

Again words from the television penetrated through the jumbled thoughts. "Although not confirmed, a secret service agent has told a reporter that the President is dead."

The words came but my mind was trying not to hear them... or perhaps trying not to believe them. Then more reports further substantiating the fact that the President was dead.

Being a reporter and photographer, perhaps my first thoughts should have been to go out and interview people about their reactions... to take pictures of the people who knew would be stopping at the nearest church to offer a prayer for the President.

But I sat where I was... stunned, unable to really believe what I was hearing, perhaps hoping that in the excitement of what had happened there was a mistake. The President is alive. He must be!

I watched the reporters on television. You could see their throats tighten; you could hear their voices crack. I marvelled that they could do as well as they were doing. I should be out talking to people and getting pictures.

Time seemed to stand still. There was so much to do, but I could do nothing. Indeed, the world itself seemed to stand still on that fateful afternoon of Nov. 22, 1963.

Saturday Mass at McQuaid For Interracial Leader

New York—(NC)—A Requiem Mass was offered for Father John LaFarge, S.J., author, editor and champion of interracial justice, in St. Ignatius Loyola Church here (Nov. 27).

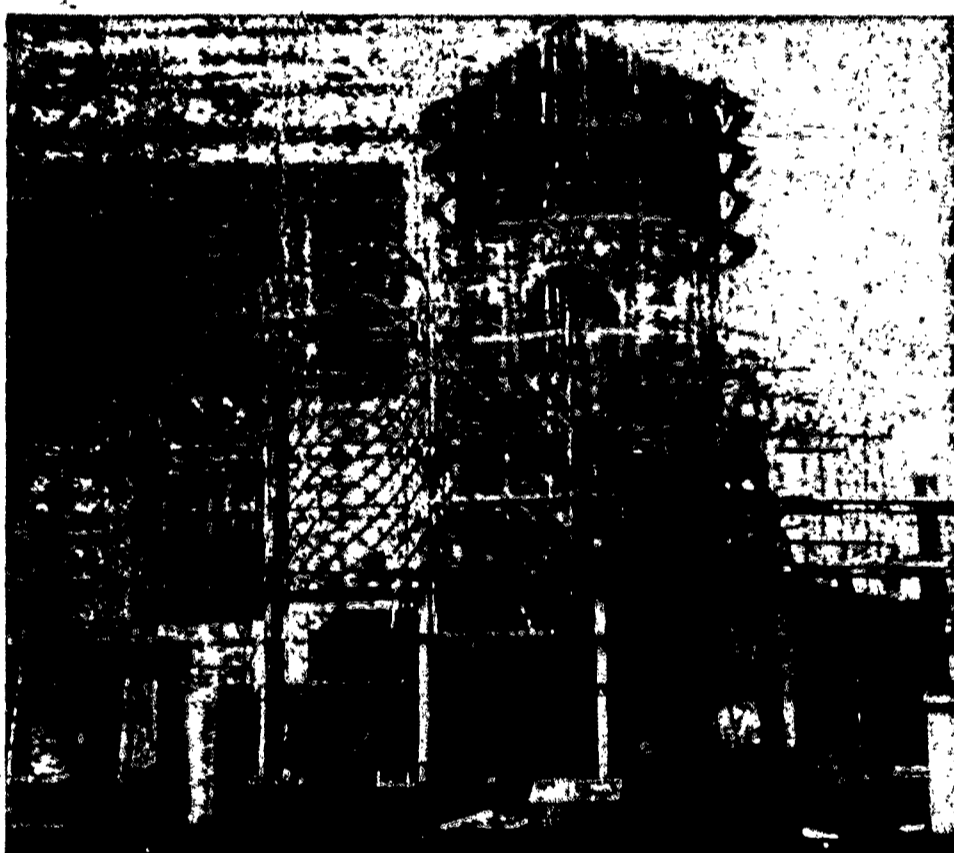
Mass will be offered for Father LaFarge at the McQuaid Jesuit High School chapel tomorrow, Saturday, at 9 a.m. Father Cornelius Carr, a personal friend of Father LaFarge, will give a brief eulogy. The public is invited.

Asked in an interview in 1958 if he thought "the Negro is trying to go too fast," he replied: "My answer is that we have had too much slowdown already... Today a slowdown would only give the forces of violence and prejudice the opportunity to build up their strength..."

Active in interracial work for more than 30 years, Father LaFarge fought against racial discrimination with his voice and pen and with his organizational ability. He called the interracial problem "cancerous" and ruled out any postponement in dealing with it.

"If we don't meet it, we're sunk as a nation," he said in an address in 1950 in Toledo, Ohio.

He died in his sleep at age 63 (Nov. 24) at Campion House, residence of the editorial staff of America magazine, of which he was an associate editor.



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