

Assassination of President John F. Kennedy

MANCHESTER'S BOOK

'The Full Horror of Dallas'

By ORR KELLY
Star Staff Writer

Leaning on her husband's casket, Jacqueline Kennedy related "the full horror of Dallas" to the President's brother as they rode in an ambulance from Andrews Air Force Base to Bethesda Naval Hospital, according to William Manchester.

In the third of Look Magazine's four-part serialization of his book, "The Death of a President," Manchester says:

"... She described the motorcade, the murder in the sunlight, and the aftermath. For 20 minutes, he listened in silence. Afterward, he said, 'It was obvious that she wanted to tell me about it, that whether or not I wanted to hear it wasn't a factor ... I didn't think about whether I wanted to hear it or not. So she went through all that.'

"Without comment or expression, he heard the full horror of Dallas; heard the tale told in the husky dulcet voice that came to him softly across the casket."

Conflict After Slaying

In greater detail than it has been told before, Manchester tells in the magazine on the newsstand today of the bitter battle between Kennedy aides and an officious Dallas County medical examiner before Kennedy's body was removed from Parkland Hospital and of strained relations between Lyndon B. Johnson and distraught Kennedy men on the flight back to Washington.

When Johnson was sworn in on the plane, he says, some Kennedy aides hid their faces from the camera because they didn't want to be part of the

scene and Kenneth O'Donnell was "pacing the corridor outside the bedroom like a caged tiger, his hands clapped over his ears as though to block the oath." (In his Warren Commission testimony, O'Donnell said he was present for the oath-taking.)

Johnson, who appears from Manchester's account to have acted with compassion and understanding toward the Kennedy people, was deeply annoyed, he says, by the way he was pushed aside and ignored when Air Force 1 reached Andrews.

Hospital Period Difficult

The actions of those who were closest to President Kennedy were undoubtedly the result not only of the assassination, but of the difficult period in the hospital after Johnson had left for the airport.

First came Vernon Oneal, "a hustling businessman," whose seven radio-equipped hearses handled tragedies east of the Trinity River in Dallas.

He had heard over his police radio of trouble with the Presidential motorcade, Manchester writes, when Clint Hill of the Secret Service called and told him to bring a casket to Parkland immediately.

"Hold on—hold on! We've got merchandise at all prices," Manchester says Oneal replied.

Acting under Hill's instructions to bring the best he had, he chose an 800-pound double-walled, hermetically sealed solid bronze casket.

Mrs. Kennedy Saw Body

As he arrived at the hospital, Mrs. Kennedy demanded to see her husband's body and slipped her wedding ring onto his finger.

Oneal then took over and shielded the green satin of the casket from the bloody body of Kennedy with seven protective

layers of rubber and two of plastic.

And then, at this "freakish hour," Manchester says, the Rev. Thomas Cain, superior of the Dominion Fathers at the nearby University of Dallas and "even on serene days a man of erratic mannerisms," slipped through the protective ring of guards into the room where Mrs. Kennedy waited.

Prancing around, Manchester writes, he waved an ornate crucifix which he said contained a relic of the "true cross," until he was driven off by O'Donnell.

Autopsy Demanded

Meanwhile, Earl Rose, the county's medical examiner, had moved in and, in his "pedantic and brittle" fashion demanded that an autopsy be conducted before the body could be removed.

By chance more than design, Mrs. Kennedy was somehow shielded from the bitter confrontation that ensued, Manchester says.

Appeals were made to the mayor of Dallas and the district attorney to permit the body to be taken to Washington. A justice of the peace—a more important legal officer in Texas than in most other states—was called. But when the coffin was rolled toward the door, Rose stood in the way.

"The Dallas medical examiner seemed to be in a tantrum," Manchester writes. "His arms were flapping, his shirt was disheveled. He was livid; the blood had left his freckled face, giving him the complexion of cold oatmeal."

A Dallas policeman who had come to Rose's aid fingered his pistol.

Finally, the Kennedy people moved forward and for a mo-

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- Loach
- Mohr
- Wick
- Casper
- Callahan
- Conrad
- Felt
- Gale
- Rosen
- Sullivan
- Tavel
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- Tele. Room
- Holmes
- Gandy

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- Times Herald _____
- The Washington Daily News _____
- The Evening Star (Washington)
- The Sunday Star (Washington) _____
- Daily News (New York) _____
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- New York Post _____
- The New York Times _____
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- The Worker _____
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- The Wall Street Journal _____
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ment, 40 people were caught in the tangle at the doorway.

Mrs. Kennedy walked slowly behind, her hand on the casket.

And then they were through the door and out to Oneal's hearse. A Secret Service agent slipped behind the wheel and Oneal, Manchester says, turned to a reporter and asked who would pay him.

When the Kennedy group reached the plane at Love Field, Gen. Godfrey McHugh, the President's Air Force aide, ordered the pilot to take off.

He was unaware that President Johnson had ordered the plane to wait until he had been sworn in. In fact, according to Manchester's account, McHugh was not even aware that the new President was on the plane.

Orders Countermanded

McHugh's orders to the pilot were countermanded by Malcolm Kilduff, an assistant press secretary. In the confusion, McHugh threatened to fly the plane himself.

When Mrs. Kennedy boarded the plane, she headed instinctively for the private cabin where she and her husband had been alone together for the last time.

"Because she regarded the bedroom as hers, she did not knock; she simply grasped the latch and twisted it. Inside, reclining on the bed, was Lyndon Johnson, dictating to Marie Lehmer," Manchester says.

The President and his secretary quickly left the room.

While waiting for the President's body and his widow to reach the plane, Johnson had talked to Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy in Washington.

It is Johnson's impression that the attorney general told him he should be sworn in before the plane left Texas. However, when Mrs. Kennedy told her brother-in-law about this on their ride to Bethesda later that evening, Manchester says, the attorney general was "startled."

Whatever the cause of the misunderstanding, the plane stood on the ground in the unseasonably warm November afternoon while Judge Sarah Hughes, an old Johnson friend, hurried to the airport to administer the oath.

While they waited, President and Mrs. Johnson came to the bedroom to offer their condolences to Mrs. Kennedy. Johnson put his arm around her, called her "Honey," but left the words of comfort to his wife.

As the three of them sat on the bed, Mrs. Kennedy called Johnson by his first name, then apologized and addressed him as "Mr. President."

Refused to Change Clothes

When the Johnsons had left, Mrs. Kennedy noticed that a white dress, white jacket and black shoes had been laid out for her, but she refused to change from the blood covered pink suit.

Later, when Dr. George Burkley, the President's personal

physician, knelt, indicated her blood-covered skirt with a trembling hand and asked her to change, she whispered: "No. Let them see the horror."

Seeing the clean clothes laid out for her, however, helped prepare Mrs. Kennedy emotionally for her part in the swearing-in ceremony—her role in preserving the continuity of the nation's government.

O'Donnell, Lawrence O'Brien, David Powers and McHugh, had no such preparation.

Instead, they expected at any moment to see Dallas police arrive and try to retrieve Kennedy's body from the plane. Col. James Swindal and his co-pilot, Lt. Col. Lewis Hanson, still fearful of a broadscale plot, expected the plane to be raked with machinegun fire at any moment.

Doubts on Catholic Bible

Finally, Judge Hughes arrived and, somewhat doubtfully, used President Kennedy's Catholic Bible to administer the oath to the 35th President of the United States.

The reluctance of the Kennedy people to take part in the swearing-in ceremony was characterized by Swindal, the pilot, who said, according to Manchester: "My President was in that box."

"President Johnson did not deserve this," Manchester says. "To a man of his hypersensitivity, such treatment was deeply wounding. More important, it was an affront to the presidency."

As Judge Hughes left the

plane, one more bizarre occurrence intruded into the tragic afternoon. A man at the foot of the steps asked her for the Bible and the 3- by 5-inch card on which the oath had been typed.

Thinking he was some sort of security man, she handed them over.

The man's identity is a riddle, Manchester says, and neither the Bible nor the card has been traced.

With the tension, the misunderstandings and the animosities of the day all contained in one jet airliner, it was "the sickest plane I've ever been on," in the words of Kilduff, the assistant press secretary.

Twice, Manchester says, Johnson sent Bill D. Moyers back to ask O'Donnell and O'Brien, who were huddled with the other Kennedy people around the casket, to come sit with him. They refused.

McHugh, he says, pounded on the table as he told the press pool reporters that he, O'Donnell, O'Brien and Powers spent the flight "with the President—President Kennedy."

Mrs. Kennedy, Manchester says, told Kilduff to be sure to tell the press when they landed that she had remained "back here... with Jack."

Drinks Suggested

To help them survive the torment of simply sitting on the plane, O'Donnell told Jackie he was going to have "a hell of a stiff drink" and suggested she have one too.

For the first time in her life, Manchester says, she had a drink of Scotch, and then another. Later, he says, whenever she had whisky, it was Scotch, because it made her remember the hours she would not permit herself to forget.

The men standing around her drank glass after glass, Manchester says, and Kilduff later estimated he had consumed nearly two-thirds of a bottle of gin.

But when a friend met Mrs. Kennedy and her escorts at Bethesda Naval Hospital, they were so unaffected by the liquor that he was shocked no one had sense enough to give them a drink.

In the cockpit guiding the presidential plane back toward Washington, Col. Swindal soared to 41,000 feet—higher than anyone had taken President Kennedy—and rocketed eastward at nearly the speed of sound on a mighty tailwind.

But both Swindal and his co-pilot, Hanson, were so shaken by the day's events, Manchester says, that they were near collapse and wondered if they would make it to Andrews.

On the oil-stained ramp at the airport, Robert Kennedy slipped into the back of an Air Force truck to avoid television cameramen. And then, before the plane's ramp had touched the ground, he dashed up the stairs, brushed past the Johnsons, and found his brother's widow. Manchester described the scene:

"Hi, Jackie," he said quietly, putting an arm around her. "I'm here." Those around them started; his voice was exactly like his brother's."



The Johnson swearing-in ceremony aboard Air Force 1.

—Associated Press