

THE ASSASSINATION RETOLD

In a cubicle of the National Archives Building, unmarked so it will not attract curiosity seekers, the work of chronicling the murder of John F. Kennedy still goes on. This is the office of historian William Manchester, who was engaged by the Kennedy family to write the definitive contemporary account of the crime that shook the world. The Warren Commission has exhaustively reported the clinical details in spare, police-blotter style. Manchester's job, as he says, is to go beyond the Warren Report and "put everything in perspective."

At least four writers asked the President's family for permission to do the book and were turned down. Manchester, who had not asked, got the assignment—and was given complete access to the Kennedy family—because Mrs. Kennedy liked his book about J.F.K., *Portrait of a President*. "I accepted the assignment," he says, "out of a sense of public duty. It's been pure agony."

For 14 months Manchester, a 42-year-old ex-Marine who was wounded on Okinawa, has worked 12 hours a day at his task. He has retraced the entire Kennedy trip through Texas even to covering the Dallas motorcade route from Love Field to Parkland Hospital on foot. This week he is finishing the last of more than 1,000 interviews—no easy job for his subjects or for him. "At least half the people I interviewed broke down during the conversations," Manchester says.

He has also turned up a considerable amount of new material. "Do you realize," he asks, "that an hour after Kennedy died, a car with Texas license plates was forced off the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and its occupants were almost killed? Imagine what might have happened if Johnson had been killed too. Mass hysteria might have spread."

Manchester plans to begin his book with the White House reception for Supreme Court justices on Nov. 20,

1963, President Kennedy's last night in Washington. It was a festive occasion. Not only was this the first time Mrs. Kennedy had appeared at a public function since the death of her infant son Patrick, but it was the 38th birthday of Robert Kennedy. "I want to start here," says Manchester, "because this reception will give me a chance to recapture the flavor and glamor of the Kennedy era."

The 1,000-page-plus book is tentatively scheduled for publication Nov.

22, 1968.

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