

Johnson Silent, Asks Staff Not to Discuss

Manchester's Book

Press Secretary Says Magazine Article on President's Recollections of Dallas Is Both Inaccurate and Untrue

LAT 12/27/68

BY CARROLL KILPATRICK

Exclusive to The Times from the Washington Post

AUSTIN — President Johnson will not discuss the controversial book "The Death of a President" and he has instructed his staff to refrain from discussing it, White House press secretary George Christian said

Monday

Christian made these disclosures when questioned about Newsweek magazine's report on the President's recollection of his succession to the Presidency Nov. 22, 1963.

Mr. Johnson has not seen the manuscript of the forthcoming book by William Manchester, Christian said. Nor has he seen the text of the Newsweek report of his own memories of that day.

But based on news accounts of the magazine story, Christian took issue with Newsweek's sources and information.

"The President has granted no interviews to anyone including Mr. Manchester and has asked his staff to refrain from discussing the subject of the book," Christian said.

'Inaccurate and Untrue'

"He did not talk to Newsweek. I'll not discuss the various attributions credited to so-called friends and alleged intimates except to say that I believe them to be inaccurate and untrue."

Newsweek Editor Osborn Elliott replied: "Newsweek has confidence in its reporter and in the reliability of the source from which the information came. Had it been otherwise, we would not have printed the story."

Mr. Johnson's activities on the day of President John F. Kennedy's assassination have become a central part of the controversy over the Manchester book.

Newsweek did not claim that it interviewed the President. It said intimates of the President reported his recollection of the events of the day and of his conversations with Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy, the President's widow.

For months the White House has been deeply interested in the Manchester book and has made attempts to obtain the manuscript. While Christian said he knew of no White House staff member who has seen it, it was understood that retiring press secretary Bill D. Moyers has seen the excerpts which Look magazine will publish next month.

When word leaked out several months ago that the Manchester book was critical of the President, the White House assembled considerable documentation to uphold

the President's side of the argument that he had shown the greatest possible consideration for the Kennedy family.

But it has never made any of the material public. Christian said Monday that Mr. Johnson declined to grant Manchester an interview but that he did respond to written questions which Manchester submitted.

Otherwise the President stands on the statement he made to the Warren Commission about the events of Nov. 22, 1963, Christian said.

Reporters sought unsuccessfully to draw Christian into a discussion of what he thought inaccurate about Newsweek's report of Mr. Johnson's recollections of that day.

Asked if the President would continue to refuse to discuss the book and the events of November, 1963, Christian said:

"I can't say he will

never discuss them again but he doesn't have any plans to do so."

The current issue of Newsweek reports Mr. Johnson's version, through friends, of events after the assassination. The version differs from accounts reportedly in the Manchester manuscript.

One section of the book reportedly tells of Mrs. Kennedy's shock at finding Mr. Johnson and his party already in command aboard the Presidential plane, Air Force One, by the time Mr. Kennedy's body was brought aboard.

Another section of the book, which has caused a legal hassle between the publishers and Mrs. Kennedy, reportedly relates her annoyance at being repeatedly called "honey" by Mr. Johnson.

Newsweek said Mr. Johnson recalled the Secret Service wanted to put him aboard Air Force One with its superior communications gear and to place Mr. Kennedy's coffin on the Vice Presidential Plane, Air Force Two.

"But Johnson ordered the body put aboard Air Force One," Newsweek quoted intimates as saying. **END**