

THE KENNEDYS  
How to Lose a War 2/7

"It has not been very pleasant," said U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy—meaning, of course, the long-running row over William Manchester's explosive book "The Death of a President." The last of the holdouts, West Germany's Stern magazine, finally capitulated last week and agreed to cut from its serialization the personal references that Jacqueline Kennedy objected to. The Kennedys thus had won all the battles—but they seemed more than ever to be losing the war.

For one thing, Manchester's side of the story (NEWSWEEK, Jan. 30) suddenly dominated the headlines. And the tales were hardly flattering to the Kennedys. "Mao Tse-tung and Jackie are the two most inscrutable people I know," Manchester told The New York Times, and to New York Post columnist Murray Kempton he quoted Mrs. Kennedy as having warned him: "Unless I run off with Eddie Fisher, the people will think that anyone who is in a fight with me is a rat." Bobby, who had political problems enough, clearly wished the whole mess would go away. "It all finally comes down to the fact that Mr. Manchester gave his word and then broke it," he said. "No statement or interview . . . however dramatic, can alter that plain fact."

Nor could any amount of wishing alter the plain fact that the book flap had hurt the Kennedys. A George Gallup poll taken early in January while the controversy was a bubble, placed Bobby ahead of Lyndon Johnson by 48 to 39 per cent in popular favor for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1968. But later soundings by Louis Harris indicated that Bobby had lost a 54-46 lead he held over LBJ two months ago and now trailed LBJ, 56-44. And the battle has shaken even Jacqueline Kennedy's pedestal. Fully one-third of the public, Harris found, "thinks less" of Jackie as a result of her fight with Manchester.