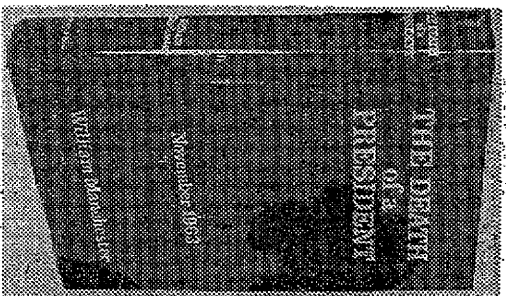


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Roberts Book Praises LBJ



THE MANCHESTER BOOK

WASHINGTON, March 8 (UPI) — A new book about the assassination of John F. Kennedy disputes William Manchester's statements in "The Death of a President" that Lyndon Johnson was in unseemly haste to assume the presidency after the assassination and in considerate to members of the Kennedy staff.

On the contrary, says Charles Roberts, White House reporter for Newsweek magazine in "The Truth About the Assassination," published by Grosset and Dunlap yesterday, the new Chief Executive conducted himself admirably.

He was, says one passage,

"careful, correct, considerate and compassionate" aboard Air Force One.

"President Johnson is capable of cruelties," Roberts wrote. "Like his predecessors, he can be ruthless, callous, self-centered and profane. But it just happens that on that wretched afternoon, Manchester notwithstanding, he rose to the occasion as few men could after having such an awesome burden suddenly and unceremoniously thrust upon him.

"To put it more precisely, the hours from 1 p.m., when Kennedy died, to 4:59 p.m., when Air Force One touched down at

Andrews (the Air Force Base outside Washington) were four of Johnson's finest."

Roberts was one of two reporters aboard the presidential plane, Air Force One, which brought Kennedy's body and the newly sworn President Johnson back to Washington from Dallas a few hours after the Nov. 22, 1963 assassination. The other reporter aboard the plane was Merriman Smith, United Press International White House reporter.

Roberts also expresses fear that public sentiment whipped up by critics of the Warren Commission might lead to demands for disinterment of the slain President's body.

In a preface to his book, Roberts noted that in 1887 and again in 1901, Abraham Lincoln was disinterred because of rumors sweeping the country that his coffin was empty. The second exhumation of Lincoln came shortly before he was permanently enshrined in a crypt at Springfield, Ill. In each case the coffin was open and the course inspected for identification.

Roberts said the questions raised about the Warren Commission's findings in the Kennedy assassination could lead to recurrence of the grim situation involving Lincoln's body.