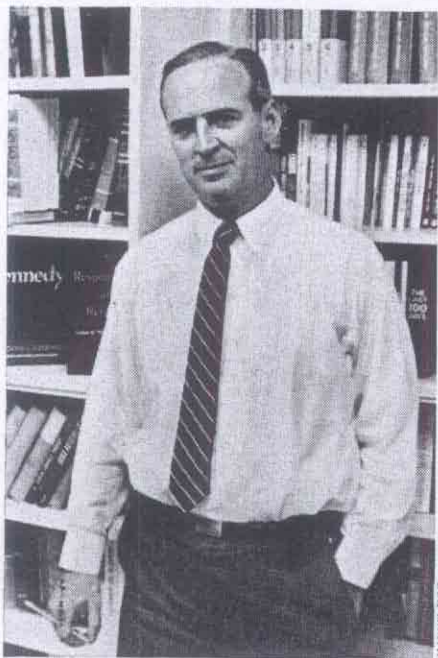


## THE PRESS



THOMAS

Burned, but still at the stove.

### EDITORS

#### The Art of Amiable Persistence

Though many a U.S. publisher would have mortgaged his mother to buy Svetlana Allilueva Stalina's memoirs, Manhattan's genteel Harper & Row won the prize without even trying. Svetlana's lawyer, Edward S. Greenbaum, simply phoned his old friend Cass Canfield, Harper's chairman. The motive, though, was something more than friendship. What helps Harper to beat all competition for big books by big names is a secret weapon named Evan Welling Thomas 2nd—the amiably persistent editor who has polished more books by important public figures than anyone else in publishing.

In his 22 years at Harper, Executive Vice President Thomas, 46, has carved a unique niche in hard-cover journalism. To Svetlana's memoirs, Thomas can add such glittering editorial credits as Maxwell Taylor's *The Uncertain Trumpet*, Matthew Ridgway's *Soldier*, John Gardner's *Excellence*, Chester Bowles's *Ambassador's Report*, Merriam Smith's *Thank You, Mr. President*, William Attwood's *The Reds and The Blacks*, Theodore Sorensen's *Kennedy* and William Manchester's *The Death of a President*. Only as a sideline does Thomas edit a few novelists, including John Cheever. As he sees it, "there's something romantic about people dedicated to public service."

**Sweet & Sour.** Son of Norman Thomas, America's foremost Socialist and perennial presidential candidate, Thomas quit Princeton in 1941 to drive an ambulance in North Africa for the American Field Service, later served aboard a U.S. Navy LST in the Atlantic.

In his first effort as a bright young Harper editor after the war, Thomas edited *Coral Comes High*, a Pacific battle memoir by Marine Captain George P. Hunt, now LIFE's managing editor. Ever since, Thomas has tirelessly pursued "instant history." Once he decides a man is worth a book, Thomas never lets him forget it. Well before the Kennedy assassination, he encouraged Theodore Sorensen to write a book. "When Sorensen finally decided to leave the White House," he says, "I was sitting on his doorstep."

Like the late Maxwell E. Perkins, his editing idol, Thomas is famous for close rapport with his authors: "Some you get to know so well that you are aware of what they are going to say before you read their manuscripts." In the Manchester dispute, Thomas learned that rapport can sometimes turn sour. In 1955, Thomas helped persuade a bed-ridden Senator John Kennedy to turn a couple of his historical essays into a book, *Profiles in Courage*. He later edited Bobby Kennedy's account of his experiences with the McClellan crime committee investigations, *The Enemy Within*. But after the President's death, the family got touchier. When Thomas submitted Paul Fay's *The Pleasure of His Company* for their scrutiny, they demanded all sorts of changes. "Jackie was really the editor," recalls Thomas.

**Get It Down.** When Pierre Salinger asked him to get the Manchester book for Harper, Thomas first declared: "This company doesn't want to make a penny from the murder of John Kennedy."\* That sold the Kennedys on Harper. Once he had the manuscript and saw in what grim detail it discussed the assassination, Thomas tactfully urged that Bobby and Jackie avoid it and appoint surrogate readers. The go-betweens' suggestions for changes were so demanding that Thomas finally quit listening. Astonished at his independence, Kennedy loyalists attacked Thomas and even now spread cutting stories about him on the cocktail circuit. Bobby Kennedy withdrew a collection of speeches that Harper was scheduled to publish. "If you live in a kitchen, you expect a hot stove," says Thomas philosophically. "But not this hot a stove."

Thomas is well aware that history can be written in white heat too soon after the event, that it may open raw wounds and hurt living people. All the same, he says, "people with a real knowledge of history should get it down. Admittedly, it's only a part of history, but that part can be balanced with other information." Though burned by the Kennedy experience, Thomas still delights in edit-

\* Nor did the company make much ultimately. Since it agreed to donate all profits after the first 100,000 copies to the Kennedy Library, it made only \$33,000 after costs and taxes on the bestselling book.

ing live history. He expects no problems with Svetlana. "In this case," he says, "the lady is mature and experienced." Indeed, Thomas seems to regard almost anyone's life as potential history. "Are you writing a book?" he prods public personages in his urbane way. "If you do write one, will you let me know?"