

Secret Conference on

By **RELMAN MORIN**

Of The Associated Press

A highly placed official in President John F. Kennedy's administration described today a secret conference which—inadvertently—may have led up to Mrs. Kennedy's legal action to block publication of the book about the assassination of her husband.

"The question of a lawsuit was put down as a

last resort," the former official said. It was only mentioned.

He said he is "sure" that the publishers of the book learned of the sense of the meeting. And he said he believes they therefore concluded that they could resist further requests by Mrs. Kennedy for revisions or deletions in the manuscript of William Manchester's book, "Death of a President."

When efforts to compromise failed, he said, Mrs.

the Kennedy Book

Kennedy brought the suit. Her attorneys will charge breach of contract, arguing that the Kennedys have not approved the manuscript of the book, as agreed upon in a "memorandum of understanding," signed by Manchester and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

Further, Mrs. Kennedy objects to certain passages in the manuscript describing her emotions and actions in the aftermath of the tragedy in Dallas, one of her friends said.

The former official gave this version of the conference:

It was held last October in Sen. Kennedy's New York City apartment. It lasted five hours.

Mrs. Kennedy did not attend. Sen. Kennedy was present "only a short time."

The meeting was called "because things had reached a difficult state with respect to certain parts

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A Secret Meeting on Kennedy Book

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of the book. The purpose was to work out compromises on them."

The group included Richard Goodwin, Theodore Sorensen, Pierre Salinger, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Burke Marshall, James Greenfield, John Douglas and John Siegenthaler, editor of the Nashville Tennessean.

Except for Siegenthaler, all those present had held important positions in Kennedy's administration. Salinger, former White House press secretary, and Greenfield, former assistant secretary of state, considered the meeting of such importance that they flew to New York from California to attend.

A few of those at the conference had read the whole book. Others had read the parts of it which had come into dispute. "Some of it was read in the meeting."

'BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN'

The ex-official described the

book as "beautifully written," adding, "there's a headline in every page."

But, he continued, referring to Manchester's two interviews with Mrs. Kennedy, "it's clear that Manchester took stuff from the tape recorder when Mrs. Kennedy was not in control of her emotions.

"Also, the book presents a rather unfortunate picture of President Johnson."

Nonetheless, he said, the sense of the meeting was to try to work out compromises on the disputed passages and not to take the case to court.

"Until a couple of weeks ago," he said, "I had the impression that things were getting along pretty well on that. They must have run into a real snag."

He said he felt certain the publishers—Look magazine and Harper & Row, book publishers—got wind of the meeting and felt a lawsuit was unlikely. "I'm sure somebody called and told them about it," he said. He did not say who he thought might have "leaked" the information.

Yesterday, an informant who is in the thick of the fight said he had heard indications that Sen. Kennedy may wish to disassociate himself with his sister-in-law's action.

"Manchester prepared a complete statement telling absolutely everything in complete detail," the source said. "He intends to issue it today. But the lawyers have told him not to, to hold it in reserve. They're getting strong indications that Sen. Kennedy wants to get out and doesn't think it (the suit) was a good idea, to begin with."

An aide to the Senator, commenting on the report, said, "there is no conceivable conflict. He doesn't oppose the suit."

Feelers for an informal settlement reportedly were being extended, according to sources in the publishing industry. But both sides were reluctant to comment on any efforts to avoid a court fight.

The complaint may be filed Saturday, or possibly today, Mrs. Kennedy's lawyer, Simon Rifkind, said.

Rifkind, a former federal judge, said the action is based primarily on the contention that the Kennedys have not approved the manuscript of the book as it stands. One clause in the "memorandum of understanding," signed by Sen. Kennedy and Manchester, says:

"The completed manuscript shall be reviewed by Mrs. John F. Kennedy and Sen. Robert

F. Kennedy and the text shall not be published unless and until approved by them."

PIVOTAL QUESTION

The question of breach-of-contract with respect to this paragraph may pivot on two communications from Sen. Kennedy.

A central figure in the pending action related this sequence of events with respect to the messages:

In late spring, when a number of revisions of Manchester's manuscript were requested, the author became "very distraught." The source said, "he wondered if the book ever would be published."

Manchester's representatives asked for assurances from Kennedy, and the senator sent a telegram saying the family would not stand in the way of publications. This, the publishers are expected to argue, constituted a release for the book.