

BOB CONSIDINE

If Old Joe Kennedy Had

IT BOGGLES MY BRAIN when I try to figure out what turns the tantrums over the Manchester book would be taking today if Joseph P. Kennedy Sr. was not incapacitated by a stroke.

Behind the curtain that has fallen between himself and communication with the outside world must seethe frustration and anger fierce enough to create spontaneous combustion. But it is the fate of this once volcanic man to suffer in helpless silence the playing out of a seamy drama that has brought no credit to any of the principals.

The old saw about every action inducing a reaction does not apply to "The Death of a President." This book has succeeded in tarnishing the images of everyone it has touched, chiefly that of the woman who just a short time ago was voted the most admired person of her sex in all the world.

Jacqueline Kennedy did not step down from her pedestal daintily. She threw herself down.

Old Joe would have been in the thick of this fight. The guess here is that he would have charged ruggedly to the side of the family, blasted Manchester out of the ballpark, and offered to buy Look Magazine and Harper & Row just to scrap them.

On the other hand, he might have restrained his daughter-in-law and his son, the Senator, from making their belated moves to vitiate the personal and political passages in the script. Or taught them how to do this in a craftier or tougher way. Old Joe was both crafty and tough.

If Manchester and the assorted publishers bucked old Joe in his prime he would have fought them to the hilt with all his power of sulphuric invective, his skills and the vast fortune he always tapped generously when he felt a cause or crusade warranted the tapping.

"How many states do you think Jack would have taken if he hadn't been a Catholic?" I asked old Joe just after the 1960 election.

"Forty-eight!" he snapped testily.

A veteran N. Y. Journal-American photographer who was taking candid shots of him during that interview asked him to straighten his necktie. Old Joe obliged. The instant he touched the knot the photographer flashed a bulb.

One of the nation's richest men vaulted out of his office chair like a shell and, red of face, cursed the photographer until the plaster shook. The poor man instinctively

Been In There Fighting

threw up a guard as if waiting to be whipped.

"Don't you ever do that again, you——," old Joe shouted when he cooled out a bit. "If you want a picture of me adjusting my tie you say to me 'I want a picture of you adjusting your tie.' But if you ever try to trick me again, I swear to God I'll..."

Old Joe ruled his family, dreamed of steering Joe Jr. into a seat into the House of Representatives, then on to the Senate and to the White House.

Joe Jr. had everything: looks, intelligence, shrewdness, ambition and millions.

When young Joe was killed in a heroic air mission over Europe it was inevitable that Jack would step in the political box. JFK would have preferred to be a foreign correspondent, a writer, maybe even a professor at Harvard.

"But I never had a chance for any of those things after Joe died," he told me just after the 1956 convention, where he had lost his bid for the number two spot on the ticket headed by Adlai Stevenson. Estes Kefauver beat him out. Then he added reflectively, "If I had died after that bit in the Pacific, it would have been Bobbie, with my father. If Bobbie had gotten knocked out, Teddy."

What would the old champ be doing to-

day, if God hadn't ordered him to hang up his glove? What iron-clad orders would he be issuing to the clan? No man can know because old Joe is not able to issue those commands. But it seems unlikely that things would have turned out quite as disastrously for all concerned if he had been in charge.

It is conceivable that he would have stood out in front of all the rest of them and taken the punishment himself, secure in the knowledge that he had absorbed bigger and better beatings from political and business foes in the golden years of his vibrant life.

I'm sure of one thing. He would have protected the memory of John Fitzgerald Kennedy a lot better than it has been fended for by either the widow or the late President's brothers. I would hazard the guess also that if old Joe were operating on all eight cylinders, his daughter-in-law would never have been quoted in public as saying that anyone who combatted her opposition to the Manchester book would be regarded as a "rat" by the general public unless she in turn suddenly eloped with Eddie Fisher.

Whether by coincidence or design Fisher immediately announced his engagement to Connie Stevens.