

Bulletin 2/24/67

The Missing Oath-of-Office 'Bible'

Washington — Probably not since issuance of the Warren Commission report on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy has there been such a rehashing of the tragedy.

There are several obvious reasons for this situation: the flood of books last year challenging the commission's findings; the forthcoming William Manchester book, "Death of a President," and in recent days, the New Orleans investigation of a possible conspiracy connection with the assassination.

The current wave of interest has led some people to speak up a bit more about facets of the case which they had regarded earlier as either utterly fantastic or not worth spreading.

Oath-Taking 'Incident'

For example, long before the Manchester book began to appear serially, a story circulated here in Washington to the effect that aboard the White House plane in Dallas on the day of the assassina-



Smith

By MERRIMAN SMITH
UPI Writer

tion, it was not a Bible on which President Johnson placed his hand when he took the oath of office.

According to this unverified account, the volume was a missal, a Roman Catholic book of prayers used in saying Mass, which someone turned up in Kennedy's personal quarter aboard the plane.

The federal judge who administered the oath, Sarah Hughes of Dallas, handed it to a man when she left the plane. Manchester and others say the book has not been seen since. Manchester called the book John Kennedy's most cherished personal possession, his own "Bible," and the author found it quite ironic that such a historic volume was left behind in Dallas, the scene of the President's death.

Legality Not in Question

Whether the book was a Bible or not has no bearing on the legality of the oath taken by Mr. Johnson. The Constitution makes no provision whatever for the use of any holy document in the administration of federal oaths.

About the only provable facts

at this point in the case of the oath are that Lyndon Johnson thought he used a Bible; the judge thought so, too; the judge had no Bible with her when she arrived at the plane; she had no book of any sort with her when she left the airfield, having handed it to someone whom she apparently thought was a member of the presidential party.

Roadblocks Understandable

It is easy to understand why efforts to confirm such a story would run into roadblocks. If a Kennedy aide did pick up the book, believing it to be a Bible, and were asked about it today, it would be most surprising if he changed his story. President Johnson and his staff, wanting to stay as far away as possible from the current storm of publicity about the assassination, certainly would not be likely candidates for a discussion of the matter.

This is not a story vitally important to history, but it is interesting, even if unconfirmed. The story is pertinent to the current climate only because of its longevity and the fact that no one in a position to know seems willing to discuss the matter publicly.