

# Johnson on Humphrey's 1968 Defeat

By Jack Anderson

Lyndon Johnson charges in his forthcoming memoirs that Richard Nixon's allies insured Hubert Humphrey's 1968 presidential defeat by secretly persuading the Saigon government to stay away from the Paris peace talks.

The former President's memoirs, entitled "the Vantage Point," are being kept under tight wraps. But we can quote the highlights.

Here, for example, is how Johnson describes the GOP-Saigon skulduggery:

"People who claimed to speak for the Nixon camp began encouraging Saigon to stay away from Paris and promising that Nixon, if elected, would inaugurate a policy more to Saigon's liking. Those efforts paid off.

"On Nov. 1, after previously indicating that they would go to the Paris peace talks, the South Vietnamese leaders decided not to participate. That, I am convinced, cost Hubert Humphrey the presidency, especially since a shift of only a few hundred thousand votes would have made him the winner.

"I am certain the outcome would have been different if the Paris peace talks had been in progress on Election day."

## LBJ Rates Nixon

Despite this, Johnson is surprisingly kind in his appraisal of Richard Nixon. "I never

shared the intense dislike of Richard Nixon felt by many of my fellow Democrats . . . I consider him a much-maligned and misunderstood man. I looked upon Nixon as a tough, unyielding partisan and a shrewd politician, but always a man trying to do the best for his country . . ."

But the former President believes he could have beaten Nixon. "I am convinced that if I had run again I would have been reelected. The last polls taken in February or March, before I announced I would not run, indicated I could have defeated Richard Nixon with or without George Wallace in the running . . . (This) reflects the fact that the American people do not casually turn an incumbent President out of office."

According to the memoirs, President Johnson's decision not to seek reelection was made long before Sen. Eugene McCarthy's stunningly strong showing in the 1968 New Hampshire primary. To back up his point, the President lists a number of people—ranging from Vice President Humphrey to friendly news columnist Bill White—who he privately informed of the decision.

After he told Humphrey of the decision, Johnson reports: "As we shook hands and said good-by, he told me that he

hoped to God I wouldn't go through with it."

Both Lady Bird Johnson and the President's two daughters favored the decision. Still, daughters Lynda and Luci wept when informed of it, and Lynda said "as a citizen" she wished he would run again.

Mrs. Johnson, the former President writes, was one of his principal advisers and strongest influences. Johnson says he had made a decision in 1964 that he would not seek a full term but Lady Bird pressed him to change his mind.

## LBJ and Kennedy

The book contains a full record of a meeting between Johnson and Kennedy shortly after the latter got into the presidential race. The record is based on notes taken by Walt Rostow and Charles Murphy, LBJ advisers.

"People try to divide us and we both suffer from it," the President is quoted as saying. "I feel no bitterness or vindictiveness."

Kennedy is quoted as telling the President that his withdrawal speech was "magnificent," and saying as the meeting ended, "You are a brave and dedicated man." It was the last meeting between the two before Kennedy's assassination in Los Angeles.

Here are some of the ex-President's comments on other personalities:

On Democrat James Eastland of Mississippi, crusty chairman of the mighty Senate Judiciary Committee: "Jim Eastland was one of the best sources of intelligence in the Senate on what the Republicans were doing. He worked closely with them. He bent over backwards to support legislation they wanted and he was often a partner in their maneuvers."

On a tense meeting with Gov. George Wallace over the civil rights strife at Selma, Ala.: "I kept my eyes on the governor's face the entire time. I saw a nervous, aggressive man; a rough shrewd politician who had managed to touch the deepest chords of pride as well as prejudice among his people."

On Jacqueline Kennedy, in the aftermath of her husband's murder: "I saw Mrs. Kennedy often and spoke with her regularly on the phone. She wrote me on Nov. 26 thanking me for walking behind President Kennedy's coffin to the church. 'You did not have to do that—I am sure many people forbid you to take such a risk—but you did it anyway,' she wrote . . . And in the depth of her mourning, she had the thoughtfulness to call us from the White House on Thanksgiving evening to wish us well."