

That Horrible

WILLIAM MANCHESTER'S second installment of "The Death of a President," which appears in the current Look magazine, is a choking shocker. With extraordinary reportorial skill and a clinical detachment that can only add to the total impact, he transports the reader into the death car. One becomes a passenger, an integral part of a horrible moment in history.

Gov. John Connally, hit in four places by Lee Oswald's ricocheting first bullet, which had first passed through the President's neck, is screaming, "No, no, no, no—they're going to kill us both!" Secret Service agent Kellerman, riding in the front seat, thinks he heard the president say, "My God, I'm hit!" Mrs. Connally begins to shriek. Jacqueline Kennedy, in a daze, wonders why Connally is shouting. Secret Service agent Greer, driving the topless Lincoln, glances over his right shoulder and continues to hold a steady course, instead of taking evasive action to avoid any subsequent shot. Every-

thing is happening in split seconds—but that was all Lee Oswald needed.

Mrs. Kennedy, whose recollections must have reconstructed the scene for Manchester, is turning toward her husband.

"The First Lady, in her last act as First Lady, leaned solicitously toward the president," Manchester writes with frugal but unforgettable use of words for so momentous a point in time.

"She had seen that expression so often, when he was puzzling over a difficult press-conference question. Now, in a gesture of infinite grace, he raised his right hand, as though to brush back his tousled chestnut hair. But the motion faltered. The hand fell back limply. He had been reaching for the top of his head. But it wasn't there any more . . ."

★ ★ ★

MANCHESTER dismisses the debate over whether two or three bullets were fired, but has no question in his mind that the trigger-puller was Oswald alone. Most witnesses agree on three shots. Ballistic experts have suggested that the first hit the president in

not in "deliberate"

World Journal Tribune, New York, Wednesday, January 25, 1967

29

Moment in History

the back of the neck and continued on to hit Connally; the second one missed the car entirely and probably disintegrated against a nearby curb, and the third tore away vast portions of the president's skull and brain. Manchester isn't sure.

He pictures Oswald as taking "deliberate aim for his final shot. Crooking his arm, Oswald drew a fresh bead with his Italian rifle. His target, startlingly clear in the crosshairs of his telescopic sight, was 88 yards away. He squeezed the trigger again."

The man selected by the Kennedys to write the ultimate account of that terrible day, and who has since had reason to question just how much of an honor it was, is unable to clear up one of the major questions that linger in the wake of the tragedy: why did Jacqueline Kennedy leave her shattered husband and crawl out on the trunk of the Lincoln as Greer finally reacted and began to race away from the assassin?

★ ★ ★

SECRET SERVICE agent Clint Hill, who had bounded out of a security car behind

the presidential car the moment he heard the first shot and saw that the president had been hit, was trying to clamber aboard the Lincoln. Its sudden and belated burst of speed tore his foot from the metal step on the side of the car's spare tire. He was in danger of being forced to fall off and scrape along the roadway.

"Mrs. Kennedy pivoted toward the rear and reached for him; their hands touched, clenched, and locked," Manchester writes. "It is impossible to say who saved whom. Neither remembers, and the film taken by Abe Zapruder (Ed. Note: an amateur cameraman who filmed the whole sequence by chance is inconclusive. Mrs. Kennedy, who was in deep shock, has no recollection of being on the trunk at all."

Hill pushed her back into the seat and spread-eagled on the trunk as the car careened toward the hospital. "He knew it was mortal, knew the Secret Service had failed; and in anguish and frustration, he hammered the trunk with his free hand," Manchester writes.

A shocker.