

Star
3/28/67
Manchester Book Tells of Near-Panic

Fears of an international plot to overthrow the United States government threw Washington into a "very red situation" the afternoon President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, author William Manchester says.

Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara alerted every American military base around the world the minute he heard that Kennedy had been shot in Dallas, Manchester says.

Normal telephone communications in Washington were virtually blacked out as a result of a deluge of calls and this could have meant the difference between survival and defeat if there actually has been a plot on the government, Manchester writes in his book, "The Death of a President."

The much-disputed book contains 350,000 words of text, plus diagrams, appendices and a list of sources. The price is \$10.

The book goes on sale April 6. Advance publicity was embargoed for April 6 but the embargo was broken today by Women's Wear Daily after a Pittsburgh store mistakenly put the book on sale.

Manchester says McNamara "kept his head and made all the right moves" even before he learned that Kennedy was dead. The worldwide warning told American military commanders,



William Manchester's "Death Of A President," with cover.

—Star Photographer Francis Routh

"this is the time to be especially alert" President Johnson is quoted in the book as saying "there might

be war" if Americans became aroused by suspicions that Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and Cuban Prime Minister Fidel

Castro had conspired to kill Kennedy. It was the "wild rumors" about a conspiracy that brought

the Warren Commission into existence, Manchester says. The commission, after a long investigation, concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald — and Oswald alone — assassinated Kennedy. Johnson had difficulty persuading Chief Justice Earl Warren to head the inquiry, Manchester says, because Warren opposed "extrajudicial activity" by Supreme Court justices.

Manchester quotes Warren as saying: "The President told me how serious the situation was. He said there had been wild rumors and there was the international situation to think of. He said he had just talked to Dean Rusk (secretary of state), who was concerned. He said that if the public became aroused against Castro and Khrushchev there might be war."

Manchester agrees with the commissioner's finding. He says his "real work" was done by the general counsel, J. Lee Rankin, and the 14 assistant counsels. As for the members of the commission, Manchester writes, "the illustrious names of the seven appointees were for public consumption."

Discussing the phone trouble, he says the Army Signal Corps still has not been given the go-ahead to link the homes of all vital government officials to an See BOOK, Page A-4

Book: A 'Very Red Situation'

Continued From Page A-1
emergency telephone system, even though it has the equipment and expertise. The lesson of Nov. 23, 1963, has yet to be learned, Manchester writes.

"A study of that afternoon suggests that in any disaster on a work day commercial telephones would become highly unreliable.

"By every readable signal, the situation was very red," Manchester writes, noting that both the president and vice president were out of Washington and six members of the Cabinet were airborne over the Pacific on a secret mission involving the Vietnam situation.

Johnson Not Briefed

Most incredible of all, Manchester says, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson did not know the Cabinet's whereabouts when he became President, and had never been informed about procedures to follow in the case of nuclear attack, instructions for which were contained in a football-shaped case aboard the presidential jet. If war had materialized "the country's retaliatory arsenal could be spiked" until Johnson was briefed.

"Had Russia attacked across the DEW line, the greatest military establishment in the history of the world might easily have been musclebound during the 15 fateful minutes of warning time and perhaps even afterward, when second-strike capacity became a factor," the book says.

The Defense Department would only say: "There have been no military communications blackouts. Military communications facilities are, and

have been, considered to be adequate."

Manchester says the most sinister development was the gradual blackout of Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Co. service in the Washington area, suggesting massive sabotage. Actually it was due to an unprecedented load of calls between 2 p.m. EST when Kennedy was pronounced dead and 4 p.m. when government workers began going home.

Phones in the Senate and House offices, the various department headquarters, the White House and even the Signal Corps were temporarily paralyzed. Sen. Edward Kennedy roamed the streets of his neighborhood, trying the phones of strangers, until he got through to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy to learn if their brother was dead.

A spokesman for the Chesapeake and Potomac said there was no blackout "but actually the only effect was that the dial tone was a little slow. In other words, if you picked up the phone you might have to wait a few seconds to get a dial tone."

Authorities from the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff down to lowest echelon secretaries feared a Russian plot and one Cabinet member over the Pacific assumed that a nuclear bomb had been dropped on an American city.

John McCone, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, ordered his extraordinary "watch committee" to focus its activities on Moscow and Peking, the book says.

And later the CIA got an "absolutely reliable" report from agents in Geneva "who had positively verified an elaborate plot to murder General de Gaulle on the stretch of pavement outside the cathedral (St. Matthews) in Washington where De Gaulle was attending Kennedy's funeral," Manchester writes.

Other Details Given

Manchester also reports:

- Not one member of Kennedy's cabinet responded with enthusiasm to Johnson and an unidentified member wrote that the new President lacked Ken-

edy's "sense of the time and the age and the forces."

- Kennedy was buried in a middle-price \$1,400 casket because the presidential assistants who selected it were influenced by Jessica Mitford's critical book, "The American Way of Death."

- Mrs. Kennedy vetoed the Catholic hierarchy's suggestion of holding the funeral at Washington's Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, and Cardinal Cushing's idea for a tomb in the middle of Boston Common.

- President Johnson asked, "What the hell am I doing here?" when Secret Service agents pushed him in among the Supreme Court justices for protection at the Arlington graveside service.

- Mrs. Kennedy sought solace in the hope that her husband had been the victim of a conspiracy. "She considered Oswald and

hoped he had been part of a conspiracy," the book says, "for then there would be an air of inevitability about the tragedy; then she could persuade herself that if the plotters had missed on Elm Street they would have eventually succeeded elsewhere."

- Mrs. Kennedy's determination to mark her husband's grave in Arlington with an eternal flame aroused misgivings among those close to her but she brushed them aside. Sargent Shriver, her brother-in-law, is quoted as saying, "Some people might think it's a little ostentatious." Mrs. Kennedy snapped, "Let them." William Walton, an artist, called her plan for the flame "aesthetically unfortunate."

- There were threats against Johnson, DeGaulle, Robert Kennedy, Warren, and Anastas Mikoyan, deputy premier of the Soviet Union.