

U. S. Defenses Alerted Round World Minutes After Kennedy Death

McNamara 3/29/67

NEW YORK, March 28 (UPI).—The United States' defenses around the world were put on an alert against nuclear attack within minutes after President Kennedy's assassination pitched the Nation into two of the most critical hours in its history, William Manchester's "The Death of a President" disclosed Tuesday.

The so-called "official" account of the 1963 tragedy, which went on sale prematurely in Pittsburgh prior to the April 7 publication date, said that a

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near-blackout of telephone service in Washington for several hours after the assassination added to the dangers of the power lapse in the Executive Branch of the Government.

McNAMARA PRAISED

In the little more than two hours between the time Mr. Kennedy was shot and Lyndon B. Johnson took the oath of office as President, the United States was extremely vulnerable to attack or a government "coup" instigated by a foreign power, Manchester wrote.

He praised Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara for making "all the right moves" in the face of a situation that had all the aspects of a sinister international plot.

CABINET AIRBORNE

The telephone blackout in the Capital might alone have meant the difference between survival and defeat if Russia had been plotting nuclear war, Manchester wrote. The President was dead in Dallas, the new President tarried there to be sworn in, and six members of the cabinet were airborne over the

Pacific bound for Tokyo after a Vietnam council of war in Honolulu.

"By every readable signal, the situation was very red," Manchester asserted.

AREA TROOPS WARNED

McNamara conferred with Gen. Maxwell Taylor and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, of which Taylor was chairman, and

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inate any material of historical importance.

DENIAL BY PHONE CO.

As soon as Manchester's story of a telephonic blackout was publicized, the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. issued a denial, saying there was an unusually heavy volume of calls in the Washington area after the assassination "but actually the only effect was that the dial tone was a little slow."

Manchester said the tie-up was so bad that it proved "telephones would become highly unreliable" in case of any national disaster on a work day. He said the Army Signal Corps could overcome this by linking the homes of all vital government officials to an emergency telephone system but that the Corps has not been given the green light to go ahead.

HINT OF SABOTAGE

The author said the gradual blackout of Chesapeake and Potomac service suggested the possibility of sabotage, especially when phones in the Senate and House offices, 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 could get through to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy to learn whether their brother was dead.

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 wrote that "it became obvious that in a national emergency this (telephone serv-

ice) would be the first link to snap."

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.

ELABORATE PLOT

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

De Gaulle was urged not to walk behind the coffin with other heads of state but to take a limousine out of "courtesy to Mrs. Kennedy." The French President replied that his "courtesy to Mrs. Kennedy would be to show disregard for his life," and he walked.

"PFFT," SAYS DE GAULLE

FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover made a final appeal to de Gaulle, whose reply was "pfft."

Manchester also reported that there was a "serious" bomb scare in the White House Red Room after the post-funeral reception attended by de Gaulle, but he gave no details.

When the story of Lee Harvey Oswald's stay in Russia became known to the experts, the suspicion of a Communist plot deepened and the State Department's principal officers began "a spirited discussion over the possibility of war." Under-Secretary of State Llewellyn Thompson argued that the Russians might kill defectors but did not assassinate chiefs of

state.

MIKOYAN WEEPS

Thompson was vindicated by events, and First Deputy Premier Anastas I. Mikoyan of Russia became one of the chief mourners at Kennedy's funeral, weeping openly on a number of occasions, Manchester related. When Mrs. Kennedy told him he and Premier Nikita Khrushchev "must carry on" her husband's work for peace, he covered his face with both hands to hide his emotion.

Among previously unpublished material in the book are these disclosures:

— Speaker of the House John W. McCormack, second to Mr. Johnson in the line of Presidential succession, refused Secret Service protection as an "intolerable intrusion in my private life."

— Not one member of Kennedy's cabinet responded with enthusiasm to Mr. Johnson and an unidentified member wrote that the new President lacked Kennedy's "sense of the time and the age and the forces."

DEATH BY 10 SECONDS

— Jack Ruby's entry into the Dallas jail basement, where he shot Oswald, was made pos-

sible by a guard's absence of only 10 seconds to hold traffic back from an entrance ramp.

— Oswald was deprived of any chance of surviving his wound by clumsy artificial respiration applied by a Dallas detective, probably causing hemorrhaging.

— Ted Kennedy wore his dead brother's striped pants, hastily altered by a White House aide, to the funeral because a rental agency sent him an incomplete full-dress suit.

INFLUENCED BY BOOK

— Mr. Kennedy was buried in a middle-priced \$1400 coffin because the Presidential assistants who picked it out 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 the Washington Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and Cardinal Cushing's idea for a tomb in the middle of Boston Common.

— Former President Eisenhower thought the networks'

all-out television and radio coverage of the funeral functions was "upsetting to the American people."

JOHNSON SURPRISED

— 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 used the post-funeral reception as an opportunity to tell de Gaulle that everybody had become bitter over this "France, England, America thing."

— Mrs. Kennedy did not send Mr. Johnson a letter of congratulation on his 1964 election because "she had said goodbye to all that."