

# LBJ Briefed on Nuclear Reply

## Before JFK Died, Pentagon Says

NEW YORK (AP)—The Defense Department denies state-

ments in William Manchester's book that President Johnson had not been advised on procedures for ordering nuclear retaliation in event of attack after the Kennedy assassination.

Security officials in the Kennedy Administration also denied that Johnson had not been briefed. The U. S. atomic attack code was carried in a football-

shaped satchel in the presidential jet which took Johnson and the body of Kennedy back to Washington from Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

Kennedy officials said that at Kennedy's insistence Johnson had been familiarized thoroughly on the contents of the satchel.

MANCHESTER says in the book, "The Death of a President":

"The difficulty was that Johnson had no idea of what was in the bag. He knew that it existed, but he hadn't been briefed about the contents, and if the thunderbolt of all-out war struck that afternoon, the country's retaliatory arsenal could be spiked until he had been led through Taz Shepard's primers for the first time."

Capt. Tazewell Shepard was a

military aide to President Kennedy.

Manchester also writes:

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

A spokesman for the Defense Department issued a statement yesterday saying:

"The statements carried by the press services attributed to William Manchester bearing on the nuclear readiness of the United States on Nov. 22, 1963, were untrue.

"On that date, Lyndon Johnson, as vice president and as President, was fully aware of the procedures used to authorize the release of nuclear weapons in retaliation against attack on the United States."

Manchester also says there was a slowdown in commercial telephone service because of the great load of calls in the hours immediately after the assassination. He says phones in the Senate and House offices, the White House and the Signal Corps had been paralyzed temporarily.

REGARDING the passages on the slowdown in commercial telephone service, the Defense Department said:

"Governmental communications, military and civil, were fully operational at all times and were far in excess of any requirement arising out of any security emergency. Those secure communications operate independently of commercial systems."

A spokesman for the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. in Washington said that due to the unusually heavy traffic after the assassination, "if you picked up the phone you might have to wait a few seconds to get a dial tone."

The Defense Department also book issue with a passage in the international plot to overthrow the United States government prompted Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara to alert every American military base around the world the moment he heard Kennedy had been shot in Dallas.

THE Defense Department said:

"The joint staff did not order any change in the state of alert of the armed forces following the assassination of President

Kennedy. However, the joint nation lock containing "various staff did send a message to the commands informing them of the assassination and cautioning that they should be especially on the alert. Routine posture remained in effect.

"Although there was no official change in state of alert, some commands did on their own initiative take special precautions. SAC (Strategic Air Command) was one which tightened up for a few hours before relaxing."

Much of the contents of the book, which went on sale in Pittsburgh prematurely yesterday, has been serialized in Look magazine.

Undisclosed passages include Manchester's description of the satchel containing the codes needed to launch a retaliatory nuclear attack.

Manchester says the man in charge of the black bag was WO Ira D. Gearhart of the Signal Corps. He says Gearhart had "the most sinister task in the presidential party" and was variously known as "shadow," "the man with the satchel" and "the bagman."

MANCHESTER describes the bag, sometimes called "the football," as being a 30-pound metal suitcase with an intricate combi-

Manchester's description continues:

"Inside one packet were cryptic numbers which would permit the President to set up a crude hot line to the prime minister of the United Kingdom and the president of France on four minutes' notice.

"A second provided the codes that would launch a nuclear attack. The rest contained pages of close text enlivened by gaudy color cartoons. They looked like comic books — horror comics, really, because they had been carefully designed so that any one of Kennedy's three military aides could quickly tell him how many million casualties would result from Retaliation Able, Retaliation Baker, Retaliation Charlie, etc. . . ."

THE book, published by Harper & Row, had an April 6 release date for reviews, but the embargo was broken yesterday by Women's Wear Daily, a tabloid newspaper for the fashion trade, after the book went on sale prematurely in Pittsburgh. The book runs 647 pages, plus charts, diagrams and a list of sources. Price is \$10.