

C&P CO DENIES CHARGE

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Phone Blackout Periled U.S., Manchester Says in His Book

NEW YORK, March 28 (UPI) — President Kennedy's assassination precipitated a two-hour phone blackout in Washington that could have meant the difference between survival and defeat if Russia had been plotting nuclear war, William Manchester's "The Death of a President" discloses.

(A Chesapeake & Potomac spokesman said today that Washington area phone service "may have been a little slower than usual," but that there was no "blackout" of any sort. He said so many people trying to make calls at once forced a delay of "about 10 or 15 seconds" before dial tones came thru.)

"A study of that afternoon suggests that in any disaster on a workday commercial telephones would become highly unreliable," according to Mr. Manchester.

CREAM OFF

The 710-page account of the assassination and its aftermath — published by Harper & Row — will go on sale for \$10 a copy just a month after the final installment of a four-part series in Look Magazine. The Look series skimmed the cream off the highly detailed, minute-by-minute history but slighted Mr. Manchester's thesis that the United States was vulnerable to

a Government coup or an attack by a foreign power during the tragedy in Dallas.

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

Most incredible of all, Mr. Manchester says Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson did not know the Cabinet's whereabouts when he became President and had never been informed about procedure 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 Mr. Johnson was briefed.

TIME OUT

"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 and time and perhaps even afterward, when second-strike capacity became a factor," the book asserts.

The author says the most sinister development was the

gradual blackout of Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co., service in Washington, suggesting massive sabotage. Actually it was due to an unprecedented load of calls between 2 p. m. when Mr. Kennedy was pronounced dead and 4 p. m. when Government workers began going home.

Sen. Edward Kennedy roamed the streets of his neighborhood, trying the phones of strangers, until he got thru to Attorney General Robert E. Kennedy to learn if their brother was dead.

"It became obvious that in a national emergency this would be the first link to snap," Mr. Manchester says.

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. The Joint Chiefs ordered every U.S. military base in the world on alert.

CIA Director John McCone got an "absolutely reliable" report from agents in Geneva "who had positively verified an elaborate plan to murder Gen. de Gaulle . . ." outside St. Matthews Cathedral during Mr. Kennedy's funeral ceremonies, Mr. Manchester reveals.

\$1400 Casket

Incidental information from the Manchester book includes the fact that Mr. Kennedy was buried in a middle-price \$1400 casket because the presidential assistants who selected it were influenced by Jessica Mitford's book "The American Way of Death." (UPI)