

# Manchester's Johnson Slurs Answered

By Drew Pearson

The book "The Death of a President" gives the Kennedy side of the differences between the Kennedy and the Johnson families following John F. Kennedy's assassination. Drew Pearson was in Dallas on the day of the tragedy and in today's column endeavors to give the other side of the story.

I was in Dallas on the tragic day President Kennedy was assassinated. Since that time Jack Anderson and I have talked to various members of the Kennedy and Johnson staffs in order to get the facts regarding the friction and bitterness which William Manchester reports developed between Mrs. John F. Kennedy and President Johnson.



Pearson

Unquestionably there was friction. Bitterness developed during the tense moments after the assassination. However, the Manchester book tells only one side of the story. Here is part of the other side:

First, friction occurred with the coroner in Dallas. Kenneth O'Donnell, secretary to Mr. Kennedy, and Brig. Gen. Godfrey McHugh, his Air Force aide, had been entrusted

with the job of getting the body back to Washington. But the coroner refused to release it until he held an inquest.

Finally O'Donnell and McHugh prevailed upon him. Then they had trouble with a Dallas city ordinance against carrying a casket in an ambulance. They had purchased a casket but found it was necessary to get a hearse.

It took about an hour to overcome local red tape and drive Mr. Kennedy's body to the waiting airplane.

Meanwhile, Air Force One, the presidential plane, had been waiting for the body. This delay was on the personal order of the new President, and contrary to the wishes of the Secret Service.

Emery Roberts of the Secret Service staff had ordered the plane to take off immediately. The Secret Service had no idea, in the confusion of Mr. Kennedy's death, as to whether there was a widespread plot against both the President and the Vice President and felt the new President would be safer in the air en route to Washington.

But President Johnson ordered the plane to wait for Mr. Kennedy's body. Meanwhile he telephoned Robert F. Kennedy, the Attorney General, in Washington to ask for a legal opinion as to whether he should take the oath of office immediately or wait till he got back to Washington. Bobby Kennedy did not reply immedi-

ately. But Deputy Attorney General Katzenbach called back to advise that Mr. Johnson should be sworn in immediately. If there was a national emergency while the plane was in the air, such as a missile attack on the United States, the President was the only person, as Commander-in-Chief, who could give the order to launch American missiles in retaliation.

Incidentally, Mr. Johnson addressed Bobby formally as "General Kennedy" during this and other conversations.

## Mrs. Kennedy's Ire

Mrs. Kennedy expressed indignation in the original version of the Manchester book that President Johnson used her husband's plane. However, the plane contained secret electronic communications equipment which only the President could use in case of emergency. Mr. Johnson had flown to Dallas in the Vice Presidential plane, but it did not carry this equipment. The Secret Service had decided that he must use Air Force One for the return journey in order to be able to use this equipment. Besides, he was now President.

After receiving word from the Justice Department that he should be sworn in in Dallas, Mr. Johnson sent for U.S. District Judge Sarah Hughes to administer the oath. While he was waiting for her, Mr. Kennedy's body was put

aboard the plane, and Gen. McHugh told Malcolm Kilduff, press secretary, that Ken O'Donnell wanted the plane to take off immediately. McHugh was quite excited. He had rushed through the plane looking for Mr. Johnson and Mrs. Kennedy, later said that he had found Mrs. Kennedy kneeling beside her dead husband while Mr. Johnson was in the washroom changing his clothes.

But Kilduff told McHugh the plane could not take off. "He may want to take off," Kilduff said, referring to O'Donnell, "but he isn't in charge any more. Johnson is now President."

Later, as Mr. Kennedy's body was about to be removed from the plane, O'Donnell is reported to have blocked the new President in the plane's aisle so he could not disembark with the body.

## Rumors of Boorishness

Various stories have been circulated regarding the tragic flight back to Washington. Mrs. Kennedy is reported saying she objected to being called "Honey" and did not want Johnson near her; that she didn't want "that man to touch me." It was also reported that Johnson had come back to the rear of the plane and smiled on the casket.

According to Kilduff, the new President acted with dignity and sympathy.