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Kennedy-Johnson Clash



By Andrew J. Glass
Washington Post Staff Writer

On the night before he was assassinated, President John F. Kennedy clashed with his Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson, in a stormy scene over faction-ridden Texas Democratic politics.

After their turbulent talk, held in a \$150-a-day Houston hotel suite, Mr. Johnson, according to a man on duty outside, left "like a pistol."

The clamorous exchange prompted Jacqueline Kennedy, who had withdrawn into the next room, to ask her husband: "What was that all about?" The President, appearing amused, replied, "That's just Lyndon . . . But he's in trouble."

This account of what was to be the final Kennedy-Johnson conference before the tragedy in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, comes from William Manchester's controversial

on Eve of Assassination—As Told in Book

book, "The Death of a President." It appears in the first of four 15,000-word excerpts from the book, published in the Jan. 24 issue of *Look* magazine, which will be out Tuesday.

The purpose of the Presidential swing through Texas, as Manchester notes, was to patch up a quarrel—which is still raging today—between liberal Sen. Ralph Yarborough and Gov. John B. Connally. At the time,

Mr. Johnson was a close ally of Connally and an ardent foe of Yarborough.

President Kennedy, according to Manchester, regarded the political peacemaking mission as "unappetizing and vexing." He thought, the author continues, that "Johnson ought to be able to resolve this petty dispute himself." But with the State's 25 electoral votes at stake, Mr. Kennedy disregarded the

advice of a half-dozen leading Democratic politicians and flew to Texas.

"The Death of a President" was commissioned in 1964 by Mrs. Kennedy and her brother-in-law, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.). Last month, Mrs. Kennedy sued Manchester and his publishers in an effort to delete some of her intimate revelations. The late President's widow also objected to what she re-

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garded as unfair treatment of Mr. Johnson, although this was not an issue in her court action.

The initial installment in Look, published after an out-of-court settlement with the magazine, was only slightly altered by the accord. Look agreed to paraphrase a letter that she wrote to her husband from Greece during a yachting vacation a month before his death.

The published condensation merely says that she told him "how much she missed him" in the letter. In the deleted material, according to informants, Mrs. Kennedy expresses the hope that she is loved as much as she loves her husband.

Feelings Toward Connally

The published version, however, deals frankly with Mrs. Kennedy's feelings in 1963 toward Connally, a former Johnson aide who had served as Secretary of the Navy in the early years of the Kennedy Administration.

Prompted by the dispute with Mr. Johnson in the hotel suite, which climaxed a day of campaigning in San Antonio and Houston, Mrs. Kennedy complained to her husband about Connally:

"I can't stand him all day. He's just one of those men—oh, I don't know. I just can't bear his sitting there saying all these great things about himself. And he seems to be needling you all day."

"You mustn't say you dislike him, Jackie," the President, according to Manchester, replied. "You'll begin thinking it, and it will prejudice how you act toward him."

"He's been cozying up to a lot of these Texas businessmen who weren't for him before. What he was really saying in the car was that he's going to run ahead of me in Texas. Well, that's all right. Let him."

"But for heaven's sake," Mr. Kennedy concluded, "don't get a thing on him, because that's what I came down here to heal. I'm trying to start by getting two people in the same car. If they start hating, nobody will ride with anybody."

The two people were Vice President Johnson and his political enemy, Sen. Yarborough. In San Antonio, Manchester reports, Yar-

borough "looked right through" the Vice President's Secret Service bodyguard, Rufus Youngblood, when Youngblood told him he was scheduled to ride in the Johnson convertible. Instead, the Senator entered a car with Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.), a popular and liberal Mexican-American.

Request Renewed

Later, in Houston, Youngblood renewed the request. "I'm riding with my wife in Congressman (Albert) Thomas's car, if that's all right with you," the Senator reportedly said. According to Manchester, "Lyndon nodded stonily."

Clearly Yarborough was miffed because the honor of riding with the President had gone to Connally alone. But, at that time, the Kennedy White House was more absorbed in winning the Governor's loyalty than in pacifying the liberal Senator.

(On the following day in Dallas, Yarborough, at the

President's insistence, finally rode in the third car of the motorcade with the Vice President. Connally, who rode on the jump seat in the President's limousine, was wounded when the shots that fatally injured Mr. Kennedy rang out from the Texas Depository Building.)

The Yarborough snubs on Nov. 21, the seating arrangements for the 22d—and the deep-seated political and personal animosity that they reflected—were the basic issues raised between the President and the Vice President in the blue-walled Houston hotel suite.

Manchester reports that "the substance of their final conference was unclear." However, he quotes Mr. Johnson's recollection of the meeting as "There definitely was not a disagreement. . . . There was an active discussion in which the two were in substantial disagreement."

Mr. Johnson recalled the exchange for Manchester's benefit in the summer of 1965 when he replied to some, but not all, of a series of written questions that the author had submitted to the White House.

The President, however, never acceded to Manchester's repeated requests for an interview. The White House yesterday declined to issue

any comments on the Look account.

Unflattering References

In any event, Manchester's references to the then Vice President are generally unflattering. They could prove, in time, to have a deterrent impact on the already tenuous relationship between the President and Robert Kennedy.

From a political standpoint, Manchester asserts, Mr. Johnson "had become a cipher because he lacked a power base." On the arrival of Air Force One at San Antonio's airport, Manchester writes, "there was Lyndon waiting at the foot of the ramp like Grover Whalen." (Whalen was an official but unpaid greeter for New York City.)

At still another point, Manchester reports that while the President and Mrs. Kennedy retired for the night in Fort Worth, "Lyndon Johnson jovially entertained members of his tong."

Manchester's verbal portrait of Gov. Connally is even more unflattering than the one of Mr. Johnson. The Governor is described in the book as "a classic example of the poor boy who has risen above his origins and despises them."

"Connally," Manchester writes, "acquired suavity and guile. He, first, became the friend of wealthy men, and then their staunch ally."

Manchester also disputes the Warren Commission's finding that the Trade Mart in Dallas was chosen for the Nov. 22 luncheon by the Secret Service. Instead, Manchester contends, the Trade Mart was selected by Connally as suitable for one of his "schemes" to embarrass Yarborough, whom he would have liked to see defeated in 1964.

Another Site Mentioned

Although Jerry Bruno, one of the President's advance-planning team members, preferred another site, the Women's Building, the Governor insisted on the Trade Mart a high-ceilinged structure that

could accommodate a two-tiered head table. Thus, there could be a top tier for the President, the Vice President and himself and a lower tier for lesser officials, "such as the State's senior senator, Yarborough."

Manchester found that the issue was eventually bucked to the White House, where, since the policy was to "appease" Connally, the Trade Mart was selected. The choice took the presidential motorcade past Lee Harvey Oswald's perch in the Texas Book Depository.

"The Death of a President" cites still another example of the way that fate played a hand in the assassination. The author reveals that Pamela Turnure Timmins, Mrs. Kennedy's secretary, suggested

putting a bubble top on the car to protect the former First Lady's coiffure. She was overruled.

In their 10-hour interview in 1964, Mrs. Kennedy told the author that her husband, for the first time in their marriage, asked her what she intended to wear on the Texas trip.

"There are going to be all those rich Republican women at that lunch, wearing mink coats and diamond bracelets," Manchester quoted the President as telling his wife. "Be simple—show these Texans what good taste really is."

(In an earlier draft, according to informants, Manchester quoted the President as saying "show those cheap Texas broads what good taste really is.")

As it turned out, the Texas weather was far too hot for

the Chanel wool suits that Mrs. Kennedy had packed. Manchester reports that the President gave his Air Force aide, Brig. Gen. Godfrey McHugh, quite a tongue-lashing for having incorrectly predicted a cooler climate.

Urged Not to Visit Dallas

Manchester focuses in his account on the warnings the President received of possible trouble in Dallas and the advice he was given urging him not to visit the city.

Thus, he reports that at a legislative leadership meeting held on the Wednesday before the assassination, then Sen. Hubert Humphrey (D-Minn.) and House Majority Whip Hale Boggs (La.) both said they were disturbed over word that there might be trouble in Dallas and that Boggs had told him "you're going into a hornet's nest."

The Vice President, however, has no recollection that such a matter ever came up. And Boggs reported that his warning was issued in the context of not becoming involved in the Connally-Yarborough feud. Neither of them was interviewed by Manchester.

Other warnings, according to Manchester, came from Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) the late Adlai Stevenson, and former Texas national committeeman Byron Skelton, now a U.S. Court of Claims judge in Washington, who even flew here to confer with National Chairman John Bailey in a vain effort to cancel the visit.

The copyrighted Look serialization originally was due for release Tuesday. Publication of excerpts from the magazine by the Chicago Daily News led to its release yesterday.