

A Picture of Johnson

President Johnson is reported in William Manchester's book on the assassination of President Kennedy as sympathetic to the Kennedy family after the tragedy but bewildered by the Kennedy group's hostility toward him.

These are among the insights into the personal anguish and political conflicts that followed the assassination, according to two men in the publishing business who read the manuscript of "Death of a President" about six months ago. Neither of these men is involved in the current controversy about the book.

"The over-all impression you get of Johnson at that time," said one of these men, "is that of a guy who is in a state of shock and who is confused by the Kennedy hostility."

'Johnson Will Hate It'

The book is reported to show Mr. Johnson as a "weak and ineffectual person" while Vice President who was regarded with such contempt that some persons refused to ride with him in the motorcade the day of the tragedy.

"Johnson will absolutely hate it," says one of the men. "There's no question about it to me. But to me Johnson does not emerge as an unsympathetic character."

Mrs. John F. Kennedy is portrayed in the book on the day of the murder as "quite frantic, quite hysterical, quite ferocious." The manuscript is said

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Book Pictures Johnson as Bewildered

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to tell of her wrestling with a nurse who would not allow her into the room with her husband at the hospital until a doctor told the nurse to let her pass.

Mr. Manchester, who interviewed Mrs. Kennedy for 10 hours and recorded the conversation on tape, is reported to have quoted her in the book as saying she knew her husband was already dead while he was being rushed to the hospital, his head in her lap.

"Her attitude," says one of those who read the book, "is that she is going to end this thing right and that she is quite angry at the world for letting this happen. Jackie keeps saying she wants to keep her blood-spattered clothes on so they can see what they've done."

In a sort of postscript, the book says that she has refused to throw away the pink suit she wore that day. It is wrapped up, along with her wedding gown, and has been placed in the attic of a house near the White House. She does not remember where.

Hostilities Begin

The source said the book described events soon after the assassination as follows:

Though Mr. Johnson tried to be sympathetic to Mrs. Kennedy, hostilities between the Kennedy and Johnson factions became overt even before the plane took off from the scene of the assassination.

Maj. Gen. Chester B. Clifton, military aide to President Kennedy and later to President Johnson, was trying to order the pilot to take off. Others were arguing against it. Finally, someone in the Johnson faction snapped:

"Well, Kennedy's not President any more."

During the flight, a high Kennedy aide, who was at the rear of the plane with the Kennedy group, walked toward the front and told a newspaperman:

"Make sure you report that we rode in the back with our President and not up here with him."

The greatest tension, according to those who read the manuscript, stemmed from Mr. Johnson's efforts to learn, by making telephone calls from the plane, when and how he was to be sworn in as President. He had difficulty reaching Robert F. Kennedy, then the Attorney General. When he finally did talk to him on the phone, he

received noncommittal answers.

'Wanted to Use Jackie'

"You had the feeling," said one of those who read the book, "that L. B. J. wanted to use Jackie to some extent because he wanted her to be in the picture in the swearing in."

"L. B. J. was concerned over a possible conspiracy and wanted to get out of Dallas. He feared a Russian attack. He was rather brusque. L. B. J. wanted to establish instantly that he was President."

The Kennedy group was said to have interpreted this as, "Here is this man who has been wishing he had been President all along and here he is grabbing it."

Mrs. Johnson is shown as trying to act as peace maker between the increasingly tense groups.

"The book shows the whole episode as seen through Kennedy eyes," said one of those who read the manuscript. "It isn't embarrassingly pro-Kennedy. But when you get through, you realize there is almost nothing in it that is unkind about the Kennedy family."

The bitterness between the factions was accentuated, according to these recollections of the book, by the fact that the Kennedy group put the blame on Mr. Johnson for persuading

President Kennedy to go to Dallas. The Kennedy people felt their leader was going to Texas to help Mr. Johnson iron out a difficult political situation that they thought he should have been able to settle himself.

Of Robert Kennedy, as shown in the manuscript, one of the men says:

"Bobby emerges very much the way you would expect. He was very much in charge of things. Very much in a state of shock, yet doing what you would expect of him and very much taking over the family. He comes off very well in the book."

Of Mrs. Kennedy, after the first day, this man says:

"She actually snapped back from this pretty well. By the time of her reception after the funeral, she was behaving very calmly."

According to one of those who read the book, Mr. Manchester is firmly convinced that Lee Harvey Oswald was the only person to shoot President Kennedy and that only two shots were fired.

Mr. Manchester reportedly explains the third shot by saying that Oswald already had

spent shell in his rifle before he fired at the President. This is Mr. Manchester's explanation of the three shell casings found in the depository from which the shots were fired.

Mr. Manchester is said to have written that the first shot went through President Kennedy into Gov. John B. Connally Jr. of Texas and that the second shot struck the President in the head.

Both sources praise the manuscript highly.

One says: "Manchester has done an absolutely remarkable job of reporting, one of the best seen."

The other points out that Manchester comes through as a total, utter Kennedyite. It's completely the assassination as the Kennedys could have seen it. It's the Kennedy version of the myth.

Asked why Mrs. Kennedy was upset about the book, one of the men said:

"I have a hunch that what bothers Jackie is what she told Manchester; about how she felt when holding Kennedy's head in the car, for instance. Then there are things about the childrer she may feel sensitive about."