

The National Scene

With Bruce Blossat

MANCHESTER ERRS ON FACTS OF ATTACK ON JFK'S HEALTH



FPost 1/23/67

WASHINGTON — Before April publication of his book on John F. Kennedy's assassination, "The Death of a President," William Manchester presumably has time to correct a glaring error—which appears in the magazine excerpts—on Kennedy-Johnson relations in 1960.

To illustrate Lyndon Johnson's practice of rough-and-ready Texas politics, Manchester writes in *Look* that at the Democratic national convention in Los Angeles "Kennedy himself had been smitten by Johnsonian partisans, who had spread rumors that he would not live out his first term because he was 'diseased.'"

Manchester adds parenthetically that "after Los Angeles, they blandly explained that they had been referring to Addison's disease."

This version does not accord in any major respect with the established facts surrounding the dramatic charge from the Johnson camp and the angry Kennedy rebuttal.

On July 4, 1960, John B. Connally, present governor of Texas who then was executive director of the Citizens for Johnson

Committee, and the committee's co-chairman and longtime top woman Democrat, Mrs. India Edwards, declared flatly that Kennedy was a victim of Addison's disease—an organic deficiency of the vital adrenal glands.

Said Mrs. Edwards:

"If it were not for (the drug) cortisone, Senator Kennedy probably wouldn't be alive."

These utterances, clearly spelling out what Connally and Mrs. Edwards claimed were the nature and peril of John Kennedy's ailment, were made a full week before the Los Angeles convention began.

Kennedy spokesmen quickly and indignantly denied the charge.

Kennedy's aides produced a heavily documented report from his doctors, dated June 11 of that year, asserting that he was "fully capable of meeting any obligations of the presidency without need for special medical treatment, unusual rest periods or other limitations."

In a July 5 news conference in Washington, Johnson evidently troubled by the swift but bitter exchange in Los Angeles,

sought to soothe matters by saying he thought all Democratic candidates were in good health.

The Connally-Edwards charges did not arise in a vacuum. A news conference questioner asked Connally what he thought of a Kennedy statement (directed actually to former President Harry Truman) that the "strength and health and vigor" of young men was needed in the White House.

Interpreting this as a slap at Johnson, who had suffered a heart attack in 1955, Connally suggested a comparison of Johnson and Kennedy health records, adding "they can compare Senator Kennedy's Addison's disease and Senator Johnson's heart attack."

There are those in Washington who believe that the Johnson forces' late-hour plunge into the issue of Kennedy's health remains today one of the real sources of Sen. Robert Kennedy's poorly concealed distaste for the President.

In any event, the whole matter was aired in full, explicit detail DURING and not AFTER Los Angeles.

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