

Johnson Described Events on Plane

By CHARLES GRUTZNER

Although President Johnson has declined to comment on any of the versions of what happened on the plane that carried President Kennedy's body and his widow from Dallas to Washington, Mr. Johnson's own account, which is in the records of the Warren Commission, gives no clue to the bitterness that Mrs. John F. Kennedy is now portrayed as having felt toward Mr. Johnson.

President Johnson's testimony, given in a statement on July 10, 1964, tells how the assassinated President's brother Robert F., who was then Attorney General, directed that the plane remain grounded until a Federal judge administered the oath as President to Mr. Johnson.

This account, with a reference to Mr. and Mrs. Johnson's solicitude for Mrs. Kennedy, appears at variance with published reports that William Manchester's forthcoming book, "The Death of a President," describes Mr. Johnson as having been insensitive to Mrs. Kennedy's feelings right after the assassination on Nov. 22, 1963.

Johnson Taken to Plane

Mrs. Johnson's statement to the Warren Commission, which investigated the assassination, confirms that of her husband regarding their efforts to help sustain Mrs. Kennedy in her hour of greatest tragedy. Mrs. Johnson's statement was given on July 16, 1964.

Mrs. Kennedy's own testimony to the Warren Commission, given on June 5, 1964, covered only the happenings in Dallas as far as Parkland General Hospital, where President Kennedy was pronounced dead. Her account stopped short of what happened on the plane.

Mr. Johnson's statement relates how Secret Service men took him and Mrs. Johnson in separate cars from the hospital

to Love Field, where the Presidential plane, Air Force One, was waiting.

"We were ushered into the private quarters of the President's plane," Mr. Johnson's statement says. "It didn't seem right for John Kennedy not to be there. I told someone that we preferred for Mrs. Kennedy to use those quarters.

"Shortly after we boarded the plane, I called Robert Kennedy Despite his shock, he discussed the practical problems at hand — problems of special urgency because we did not at that time have any information as to the motivation of the assassination or its possible implications.

"The Attorney General said that he would like to look into the matter of whether the oath of office as President should be administered to me immediately or after we returned to Washington, and that he would call me back.

Judge Was Called

"I thereafter talked with McGeorge Bundy and Walter Jenkins, both of whom urged that the return to Washington should not be delayed. I told them that I was waiting for Mrs. Kennedy and for the President's body to be placed on the plane, and would not return prior to that time.

"As I remember, our conversation was interrupted to allow the Attorney General to come back on the line. He said that the oath should be administered immediately, before taking off for Washington, and that it should be administered by a judicial officer of the United States."

Mr. Johnson's statement tells how Federal District Judge Sarah Hughes was called and, after a short delay, came to the plane. The statement continues:

"A few minutes later Mrs. Kennedy and the President's

coffin arrived. Mrs. Johnson and I spoke to her. We tried to comfort her, but our words seemed inadequate. She went into the private quarters of the plane.

"I estimate that Mrs. Johnson and the coffin arrived about a half hour after we entered the plane—just after 2 o'clock.

About a half hour later, I asked someone to find out if Mrs. Kennedy would stand with us during the administration of the oath. Mrs. Johnson went back to be with her. Mrs. Kennedy came and stood with us during the moments that the oath was being administered.

"I shall never forget her bravery, nobility and dignity." The statement relates that the plane "took off promptly after the swearing-in ceremony."

Mrs. Johnson's statement tells how she and her husband had at first been ushered into the Presidential private cabin of the plane "but Lyndon quickly said, 'No, no' and immediately led us out of there."

"We felt that is where Mrs. Kennedy should be," the statement says. "The casket was in the hall. I went in to see Mrs. Kennedy and, though it was a very hard thing to do, she made it as easy as possible.

"She said things like, 'Oh, Lady Bird, it's good that we've always liked you two so much.' She said, 'Oh, what if I had not been there? I was so glad I was there.'"