

Manchester Tells of Kennedy

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By Andrew J. Glass
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"You make sure, Mac—you go and tell them that I was not up front, but that I came back here and sat with Jack."

In these words, Mrs. John F. Kennedy told acting White House Press Secretary Malcolm Kilduff of her decision to remain beside her slain husband's casket, despite an invitation from the newly sworn President, Lyndon B. Johnson, to join him on the Air Force One flight from Dallas to Washington.

The smoldering animosity of Kennedy aides toward Mr. Johnson and his staff during that flight is described in the third—and, so far, the most controversial—installment of William Manchester's "The Death of a President," published by Look magazine today.

In the climax to Manchester's 16,000-word account in Look, Mr. Johnson is left standing in the stateroom while 15 persons, including the Kennedy Air Force stewards, wedged ahead of him in the plane's corridor to help carry their fallen President from the aircraft.

Mr. Johnson, eager to stress the continuity of the Government before the world, brooded about the incident. On

Nov. 23, 1963, Manchester reports, the new President confided to a Cabinet member that he had "real problems with the [Kennedy] family."

The Cabinet official provided the author with notes that quoted Mr. Johnson as saying that "when the plane came in, the family . . . paid no attention to him whatsoever, that they took the body off the plane, put it in the car, took Mrs. Kennedy and departed, and only then did he leave the plane without any attention directed or any courtesy toward him, then the President of the United States."

In time, the Kennedy family, which commissioned the book on which Look's four-part serial is based, has had its problems with Manchester. Mrs. Kennedy's advisers at one point demanded that Look cut 2737 words from the current installment. The magazine, seeking to avert a courtroom showdown, deleted some material — but far less than the Kennedys wanted removed.

Thus, Manchester reports how the wide-angle photograph of Mr. Johnson's swearing-in ceremony fails to record "the presence of a single male Kennedy aide."

President Kennedy's former appoint-

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Aides' Animosity Toward LBJ



Mrs. Kennedy enters the ambulance carrying body of the President at Andrews AFB.

ments secretary, Kenneth O'Donnell, was "pacing the corridor outside like a caged tiger, his hands clapped over his ears," while Mr. Johnson, his right hand over Mr. Kennedy's personal Bible, was sworn in as the Nation's 36th Chief Executive.

Lawrence F. O'Brien, the congressional liaison chief who remained in the Johnson Administration to become Postmaster General, retreated behind Federal Judge Sarah Hughes for the ceremony.

And Brig. Gen. Godfrey McHugh, the now-retired Kennedy Air Force aide, stood rigidly at attention beside the President's coffin in a rear compartment. Earlier, McHugh had threatened to take the controls of the plane himself to fly back immediately to Washington, in accordance with Mrs. Kennedy's wishes.

"We're not going to Andrews [Air Force Base] until the President has been sworn," Kilduff informed the frantic McHugh. "I have only one President, and he's lying back in that cabin," the General replied.

Only Mrs. Kennedy briefly overcame her grief and anger to stand beside Mr. Johnson during the swearing-in. Afterwards, she refused to shed her blood-stained clothes, saying: "No, let them see the horror."

Johnsons Sympathetic

While Mr. Johnson put his arm around Mrs. Kennedy and called her "Honey," his wife, Lady Bird, said with tears in her eyes: "Oh, Jackie, you know, we never even wanted to be Vice President, and now, dear God, it's come to this."

The stage was set for the flight home aboard what Kilduff later called "the sickest plane I've ever been on" by several grotesque scenes at Parkland Memorial Hospital.

Manchester describes Mr. Johnson as crouching on the floor of a police car that sped him from the hospital to Love Field. His protectors, who included several Congressmen, provided a human shield lest he, too, might be marked for an assassin's bullet.

All the while, the pilots of Air Force One feared the parked jet might at any moment be raked with machine gun bullets.

At the hospital, Vernon Oneal, a Dallas undertaker, hovered over an 800-pound solid bronze casket—his most expensive model. He insisted that the President's body be wrapped in seven layers of rubber and plastic to prevent the pale green stain upholstery from becoming stained with the President's blood.

While the undertaker fretted over the body, Mrs. Kennedy was approached by The Rev. Thomas Cain, superior of the Dominican Fathers at Dallas' Roman Catholic University. "I have a relic of the True Cross," he told the widow, asking here to "venerate" the crucifix in which the wooden sliver was enplaced.

Afterwards, the priest waved the relic in the air above the undertaker in the trauma room and told Mrs. Kennedy: "I have applied the True Cross to your husband."

Mrs. Kennedy, however, was shielded from a furious argument that developed over the question of performing an autopsy of the body of the murdered President before it was released.

Manchester recalls how the Dallas County Medical Examiner, Earl Rose, appeared at the hospital and announced against all pleas, that "you're not taking the body anywhere. There's a law here. We're going to enforce it."

Neither Would Yield

The argument increased in force, with neither the medical examiner nor the Kennedy clan yielding, until a Texas justice of the peace, called to the scene, was heard by O'Donnell and O'Brien to say: "It's just another homicide case as far as I'm concerned."

O'Donnell swore, pushed forward with the casket and declared: "We're leaving." But a policeman standing beside the medical examiner and the justice of the peace told O'Brien, "These two guys say you can't go."

"One side," Manchester quotes O'Brien as replying. "Get the hell over. 'We're getting out of here . . . Wheel it out!'"

"It was a panic to get out of there, O'Brien later remembered. "That little lady just couldn't stand there with her husband's body that way."

The Kennedy party arrived at Love Field, only to find, to their surprise, that the Johnson party was already aboard Air Force One.

Mrs. Kennedy made the discovery when she entered the Presidential private cabin, without knocking, to compose herself. Inside, Lyndon Johnson was "reclining" on the bed and dictating to one of his secretaries, Marie Fehmer.

Mr. Johnson and Miss Fehmer quickly left the room. Afterwards, when Mr. Johnson was about to suggest that she change her clothes for the swearing in, Mrs. Kennedy said "Lyndon" and then took a quick breath.

Was Eager to Be Sworn

"Excuse me," she added hastily. "I'll never call you that again. I mean Mr. President."

"Honey, I hope you'll call me that for the rest of your life," Mr. Johnson reportedly replied.

Manchester makes it clear that Mr. Johnson was particular eager to be sworn into office before the aircraft departed from Dallas and that he but stressed this view by citing the telephone advice of the then Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy.

Thus, when Kennedy arrived to meet the plane at Andrews, his sister-in-law told him: "He said he'd talked to you, Bobby and that you'd said he had to be sworn in right there in Dallas."

Manchester reported that Robert Kennedy was startled by the remark and noted that there must be some sort of misunderstanding, since he had never made any such suggestion.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Kennedy leaned on the coffin and whispered: "Oh, Bobby—I just can't believe Jack has gone."



Associated Press

President Johnson as he took Presidential Oath aboard Air Force One

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