

Manchester

Sparks New Row

By ARTHUR GREENSPAN

A new controversy involving Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and author William Manchester loomed today as a Kennedy source challenged the writer's assertion that the Senator "liquidated" an agreement which set terms for publication of the book, "The Death of a President."

In a wide-ranging interview on NBC-TV's "Meet the Press," Manchester made these points:

That friction between Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy and Sen. Robert Kennedy precipitated the public battle over the book: "... I think she was apparently blazing like a bonfire with Bob."

That the Warren Commission should have questioned Marina Oswald "more sharply" because the testimony of the widow of alleged Presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald was "full of contradictions."

That he had been asked "to rewrite my account of President Johnson's first Cabinet meeting," but had refused.

That a photograph of Kennedy aide Kenneth O'Donnell at Johnson's swearing-in aboard Air Force One might have been misleading, because "five witnesses" saw O'Donnell pacing "three steps away" at the time.

That he, Manchester, had not violated an agreement to give the Kennedys final approval of his book's text, as charged.

Letter and Telegram

Manchester insisted Kennedy "sent a special delivery letter to Harper's [publisher Harper & Row] liquidating the agreement," then "sent me a telegram stating members of the Kennedy family will place no obstacle in the way of publication of the book."

Although Sen. Kennedy's office had "no comment" on the Manchester statement, a source close to the Kennedys told the New York Post today:

"The fact is that the special delivery letter was a copy of the telegram and that's all it was."

"The letter was written out in letter form; it was a copy of the telegram. It did not constitute a liquidation. It was not an agreement, and it was

not approval of a new agreement.

"It would have been impossible for it to be a liquidation of the agreement because that was the whole basis of our law suit.

"After all, the law suit was based upon the violation of this agreement. This is a fact."

Manchester's statement during the hour-long telecast yesterday marked his first public appearance since he left for a Caribbean vacation more than three weeks ago.

Manchester discussed the months-long controversy which ended in an out-of-court settlement after Mrs. Kennedy had filed suit to halt publication of the book and its serialization by Look Magazine.

Manchester was asked about claims that parts of the book as published in Look, had contained errors. Manchester conceded there may be some, but seemed skeptical.

The Kennedy source also refuted two other Manchester statements made during the telecast. The author said he had been asked by Kennedy aides to make "waves of changes which I felt would constitute censorship. In one case I was asked to rewrite my account of President Johnson's first cabinet meeting.

"To me, this would have been a distortion of history. It was a threat to the integrity of my manuscript and I refused."

Denies Rewriting

The Kennedy source said, "We didn't do any rewriting, and we didn't ask for rewriting—at all." And another Kennedy source recalled that "there were some objectionable and insulting things" in that section of the book, but also insisted no rewriting was requested.

Manchester went on to say that, "now, in the end, when we were within hours literally of a trial, Mrs. Kennedy did sit up until 5:30 in the morning reading the manuscript with what a person who was present said was 'growing interest and fascination,' and the number of changes she suggested were very small."

"Just nonsense," said the Kennedy source. "It's possible that when she looked over the personal passages, it was late at night, but she did not sit up until 5:30 in the morning reading with fascination.

"As the trial date neared, she reviewed the same personal passages she had been reading ever since the summer—August—not in December.

"Yes, she did reread these personal passages, but the key point is she had read them and found them distasteful early in the summer."

Manchester said he first had heard "rumors of discontent" among the Kennedys about a week after he had "received approval" of the manuscript from Sen. Kennedy.

He said he asked for and got reassurance from the Senator's wife, Ethel, from the Senator's secretary and from Arthur Schlesinger, who was visiting in Hyannis Port with Jackie and the Senator that weekend and reported them "serene and tranquil."

"Tranquil though she may have been with Arthur," Manchester said, "I think she was apparently blazing like a bonfire with Bob."

Further questioning on that episode was cut off, but Manchester earlier had said Mrs. Kennedy was upset over Look's serialization of the book, "which she felt would be commercialization."