

# Meeting of Kennedy Friends May Have Led to Book Suit

NEW YORK (AP) — A highly placed official in President John F. Kennedy's administration described today a secret conference which — inadvertently — may have led to Mrs. Kennedy's legal action to block publication of the book about the assassination of her husband.

"The question of a lawsuit was put down as a last resort," the former official said. "It was only mentioned."

He said he is sure that the publishers of the book learned of the sense of the meeting. And he said he believes they therefore concluded that they could resist further requests by Mrs. Kennedy for revisions or deletions in the manuscript of William Manchester's book, "Death of a President."

When efforts to compromise failed, he said, Mrs. Kennedy brought the suit. Her attorneys will charge breach of contract, arguing that the Kennedys have not approved the manuscript of the book, as agreed upon in a "memorandum of understanding," signed by Manchester and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

Further, Mrs. Kennedy objects to certain passages in the manuscript describing her emotions and actions in the aftermath of the tragedy in Dallas, one of her friends said.

## The October Meeting

The former official gave this version of the conference:

It was held last October in Sen. Kennedy's New York City apartment. It lasted five hours.

Mrs. Kennedy did not attend. Sen. Kennedy was present "only a short time."

The meeting was called "because things had reached a difficult state with respect to certain parts of the book. The purpose was to work out compromises on them."

The group included Richard Goodwin, Theodore Sorensen, Pierre Salinger, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Burke Marshall, James Greenfield, John Douglas and John Siegenthaler, editor of The Nashville Tennessean.

Those present had held important positions in Kennedy's administration. Salinger, former

White House press secretary, and Greenfield, former assistant secretary of state, considered the meeting of such importance that they flew to New York from California to attend.

A few of those at the conference had read the whole book. Others had read the parts of it which had come into dispute. "Some of it was read in the meeting."

## "Headline in Every Page"

The ex-official described the book as "beautifully written," adding, "There's a headline in every page."

But, he continued, referring to Manchester's two interviews with Mrs. Kennedy, "It's clear that Manchester took stuff from the tape recorder when Mrs. Kennedy was not in control of her emotions.

"Also, the book's a rather unfortunate picture of President Johnson."

Nonetheless, he said, the sense of the meeting was to try to work out compromises on the disputed passages and not to take the case to court.

"Until a couple of weeks ago," he said, "I had the impression that things were get-

ting along pretty well on that. They must have run into a real snag."

Other sources report that negotiations fell apart a week ago today.

He said he felt certain the publishers — Look magazine and Harper & Row book publishers — got wind of the meeting and felt a lawsuit was unlikely. "I'm sure somebody called and told them about it," he said. He did not say who he thought might have leaked the information.

An informant who is in the thick of the fight said yesterday he had heard indications that Sen. Kennedy may wish to disassociate himself with his sister-in-law's action.

"Manchester prepared a complete statement telling absolutely everything in complete detail," the source said. "He intends to issue it today. But the lawyers have told him not to, to hold it in reserve. They're getting strong indications that Kennedy wants to get out and doesn't think it (the suit) was a good idea, to begin with."

An aide to the senator, commenting on the report, said,

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"There is no conceivable conflict. He doesn't oppose the suit."

The complaint may be filed today or tomorrow, Mrs. Kennedy's lawyer, Simon Rifkind, said.

Rifkind, a former federal judge, said the action is based primarily on the contention that the Kennedys have not approved the manuscript of the book as it stands.

Since Manchester's book relates the events immediately after the assassination, numerous versions of what happened on the flight back to Washington have become current.

#### Cerf's Report

Bennett Cerf, chairman of the board of Random House publishers, told an audience at Yale University's Pierson College Wednesday night that he read the unedited Manchester text and said it described an incident involving the two identical planes, presidential and vice presidential, when the Kennedy party arrived at Love Field for the takeoff.

The Yale Daily News, student newspaper, said:

"According to Mr. Cerf's narration of Manchester's book, the Johnson party reached the airfield first and, knowing that President Kennedy was dead, boarded the presidential jet.

"When the Kennedys returned to the airport with the coffin and discovered the presidential plane was already occupied, they were shocked and infuriated, said Mr. Cerf."

Cerf, reached in New York, confirmed that he made the remarks. But he said, "I was under the impression I was talking off the record."

#### O'Donnell's Report

Kenneth P. O'Donnell, appointments secretary to President Kennedy, clarified one version. He was asked to comment on the report that he boarded the presidential plane with Mrs. Kennedy and the casket, that he ordered the pilot to take off, and that then Vice President Johnson countermanded the order.

O'Donnell said: "That's true.

"I didn't know that he (Johnson) was on the plane. I was under the assumption that he had already left. . . . We had no controversy. It's all in the Warren Commission report."

The Warren report shows this testimony by O'Donnell, under questioning by Arlen Specter, assistant counsel:

O'Donnell: "I told Gen. Mc-

Hugh to have the plane take off, still all of us under the assumption or apprehension that at some moment we either might not be granted clearance to take off, or that the hospital may have in some way gotten the police to intercept us — the difficulty of that to Mrs. Kennedy was incalculable. I was in a highly desperate strait to get that airplane in the air and back to Washington.

"There was a delay of two or three minutes and nothing happened. So I headed up for the

cockpit myself, and I ran into McHugh in the meantime who said President Johnson was aboard, and that he had ordered the pilot to delay, to hold up until he was sworn in. . . .

"Mrs. Johnson took Mrs. Kennedy into the President's room on AF1. I remember she (Mrs. Kennedy) was reluctant to even go in there, but he persuaded her to. . . .

"And I went up and the President and I carried on a conversation, which, again, my recollections might be hazy—that it had been brought to his attention that I had asked for the plane to take off, and that there was some difference between him and me.

"He said to me that he had called the attorney general, and that the attorney general had indicated that it was, if not

mandatory, at least preferable, that he be sworn in prior to the airplane taking off. . . ."

The transcript shows that Specter asked O'Donnell where he sat on the flight to Washington.

O'Donnell replied: "I sat with Mrs. Kennedy almost all the way. The President called me up on one or two occasions and asked me to stay up in the cabin, wanted to talk to me, but I felt I had to stay with Mrs. Kennedy. So I sat with her on the whole trip."

Jack Valenti, former aide to Johnson, returned to Washington on Air Force 1 and was within sight and hearing of the President virtually all the time.

Valenti said: "I never saw anything frictionable, certainly nothing embarrassing. I just

know that was a sad airplane." plane."

Valenti said Johnson showed great concern for Mrs. Kennedy's grief then and later, and for the two Kennedy children. He said Johnson "went out of his way" to help Mrs. Kennedy surmount a difficult time.

Similarly, Homer Thornberry, then a member of the House of Representatives, an old friend of Johnson and a passenger on the presidential plane, said:

"All I know about it is that the President and Mrs. Johnson showed every consideration to Mrs. Kennedy."