Exclusive Interviews With 3 Men Present at Hospital When JFK’s Body Was Removed

By JIM WHelan

William Manchester's book, "The Death of a President," is a distort-ed, slanted, twisted account of events following the assassination of John F. Kennedy. It is riddled with misquotes, exaggerations and mistakes. In fact, the book is likely to mislead millions of readers.

That is not the judgment of The ENQUIRER. It is the judgment of three eyewitnesses who participated in events at Parkland Hospital after the tragedy in Dallas, Texas, on Nov. 22, 1963.

For exclusive interviews with The ENQUIRER, all three have di-rec-tly contradicted Manchester's version of those events. Those witnesses are:

• Judge Theron Ward, who approved the removal of the President's body prior to an autopsy.
• Funeral director Vernon Oneal, who provided the Kennedy coffin.
• And Police Sergeant Robert Dugger, the highest-ranking police officer at the hospital.

All three were present at Parkland before and during the removal of the dead President's body to Love Airfield for the flight back to Washington, D.C.

All three are prominently mentioned in Manchester's book, serialized in Look magazine, which purported to describe events at the hospital and the return flight. And all three now say that the Manchester version of the hospital drama is riddled with shocking errors.

Manchester says, over the objections of the Dallas County Medical Examiner, who wanted either an immediate autopsy as prescribed by law, or a release signed by the appropriate authority. The account describes scuffling among officials — which witnesses say never took place.

It attributes unflattering statements and behavior to the judge, funeral director and police officer, which they deny.

Manchester also tells about the flight back to Washington aboard Air Force One, bearing the body of Mr. Kennedy, his newly sworn successor, their wives and their official parties. After reading Manchester's account, Judge Ward said flatly:

"These are not the events as I remember them. I don't know where he (Manchester) got his information."

In his book, Manchester describes a heated argument between Kennedy aides who wanted to remove the body, and Dr. Earl Rose, the Dallas medical examiner, who suggested an immediate autopsy as prescribed by law in all murder cases.

Dr. George Burkley, the President's personal physician, sided with the aides, according to Manchester. And Judge Ward, a Justice of the Peace, was called in to re-solve the dispute.

Manchester quotes Judge Ward as saying he could do nothing, but was obligated to order the autopsy if a homicide was suspected.

And he quotes the judge directly as saying: "This is just another homicide case as far as I'm concerned." Judge Ward was flabber-gasted when he read that. He told The ENQUIRER: "I never said it was just another homicide case. I didn't intend to hold the body, but I wanted to check a point of law. I said I would handle the mat-ter as efficiently as I could."

"I released the body in the interest of the American people and not for the sake of any one person. In my mind, there was no decision to be made — I wasn't going to stand in the way of the President's body leaving."

At another point, Manchester says Judge Ward attempt-ed "to take Dr. Burkley's arm."

"But the arm was withdrawn."

But Judge Ward said: "Dr. Manchester's book is full of shocking errors.

CASKET ARRIVES: Vernon Oneal's hearse delivers JFK's casket to hospital.

O'DONNELL WAS THERE: Photo shows Kenneth O'Donnell (right) at Mrs. Kennedy's side as President Johnson takes oath of office.

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Continued from preceding page

“Nobody certainly didn’t want his arm away,” Manchester would have joked before he took Dr. Purdy’s right hand and his left hand was set in his right forearm in an arm-sling gesture.

Later in Manchester describes “rolling” and “moaning” as Kennedy wheeled the President’s body out.

Manchester went on: “It looked as though they might have to hold more than one man down and if the president intervened actively he would be no pushover. He was doing a picture.”

Judge Ward said: “The squabble that Manchester discussed wasn’t a squabble at all. There wasn’t even any discourtesy that I could see. They were all experiencing shock. There was a desire to resolve the problem. I didn’t see anybody ‘fingering a pistol.”

Manchester stated that the doctors were shot and the body would be no pushover. I didn’t see anybody ‘fingering a pistol.’ The only physical thing I saw was the tray held in the hands of the people there.

I don’t think Manchester would have accompanied with misquote as he did in this article.

“I talked to him on the phone and asked him to come here. I was told by the administration. If ever the man would go into the archives of the 19 times before. There was no indication of publication whatsoever.” Manchester described the order as “actual” and “official” and round.” Actually, it is not true. I didn’t tell the police and nobody knew years ago it’s newsworthy.

The editor predicted the judge to say: “Certainly would appreciate it if Manchester had written something.”

Oneal, the funeral director, said: “We were shocked in the way we heard the body was in the Manchester look.”

Manchester said Oneal “pressed himself over who would say ‘him’ for too often been supplied.”

“His statement was: ‘Oneal replied: ‘Not a man and the king man for living human don’t need to worry. I never asked anyone on the subject.”

“At one point in the book, Manchester said: “If it had been a jury, we would have found you guilty of not supplying the casket.”

That is a statement, until I have a body unloading in Dallas and too many more than two or three of the employees go on to lunch at the time.

I don’t think we can use standing on a driveway when my mother is a few years away. There was no question as to whether we put the call to supply a casket.

That same afternoon I have a boat in the establishment in Dallas and it was not more than two or three of the employees went on to lunch at the time.

I don’t think we can use standing in a driveway. Waiting for my mother to get back from lunch. It is not true. It never happened. I can’t understand where he got that item.

In the operating room, where the President died, Manchester says that when David Sanders worked with Dr. Kennedy’s death, seven of the President’s medical staff were there.

For Oneal said: “I put the ring on the President’s finger myself, but I do not know one.”

Manchester said: “The man had a satin lining. That’s as far as I know, as wrong

OUTSIDE PARKLAND HOSPITAL. Secret Service man carries clothing from car in right in which President Kennedy was shot. He is followed by Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry, as he takes body of the President to the hospital. The Secret Service man is carrying clothes from the car in which the President was shot.

Manchester describes Oneal’s funeral home this way: “It was at the head of the casket and I didn’t touch the body. It had a wall-to-wall carpeted Slumber Room, piped religious music, a coffee bar for hungry relatives. I didn’t think it was a best seller.”

In angry reply, Oneal said: “He painted me and my place like something out of Marx. No one modern funeral has carpeting. And we don’t have a coffee bar to serve bereaved families. He served coffee, but we don’t have a stove or cook anything, as he did.”

Manchester describes Oneal’s funeral home this way: “I don’t think Dallas was a hick town.”

Dugger said: “When Mrs. Kennedy said she had to get her husband’s body back to Washington, I figured we had to stop the President’s wife”

When the body was wheeled out of the hospital, Manchester says: “The agents and Sergeant Dugger were pushing.”

Dugger said: “That wasn’t the case at all. I was at the head of the casket and I didn’t push anyone. I could see Dr. Rose’s position and if he had tried to stop me I probably would have stopped.”

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There was no violence.”

Dugger continued: “It was Oneal who put Jackie’s ring on the President’s finger — and not the orderly as Manchester says. The President’s finger was not a best seller. Others, however, are asking on what best seller last — fiction or nonfiction.”

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