

Manchester Blames

By CY EGAN

World Journal Tribune Staff

"Overzealous employees" of Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy stood accused today of blowing up the controversy over William Manchester's book "The Death of a President."

"Had the Kennedys read the manuscript last spring, I think we would have been spared much," Manchester declared in a television interview.

"The difficulties arose on the lower levels when there were employees who knew that they would be answerable to the Kennedys and who were understandably overzealous in their suggestions."

Praising Sen. Kennedy for his "strong sense of family loyalty," the author declared that considerations of Kennedy's political future originally had played no part in suggested revision of the book.

POLITICAL CHANGES

"Afterward, there came two waves of changes—the suggestion that 111 passages be deleted, these were clearly political," Manchester said.

"They were not made by the senator, who has not read the manuscript, but by one of his representatives. These I resisted."

Manchester said he had been told that Mrs. Kennedy had read the manuscript "within hours literally" of a trial of her Supreme Court suit to block serialization by Look Magazine and hard-cover publication by Harper & Row, Inc.

"Mrs. Kennedy did sit up until 5:30 in the morning reading the manuscript with what a person who was present said 'growing interest and fascination,'" Manchester stated.

"And the number of

changes she suggested were very small. All were understandable and they constituted less than 1 per cent of the manuscript."

HASN'T SEEN LETTER

Manchester, interviewed on NBC television's "Meet the Press," said he had never seen a letter written by Evan Thomas, editor-in-chief of Harper & Row, stating the book "is in part gratuitously and tastelessly insulting to President Johnson."

The letter was addressed to John Seigenthaler, editor of the Nashville Tennessean, and Edwin Guthman, of the Los Angeles Times, two former government aides who had been asked by Kennedy to read the book.

"I will not believe it until I have seen the letter," said Manchester. He added his correspondence with Thomas did not indicate the editor held such a point of view, "so I am at a loss to explain it."

The author further maintained that "I was and still

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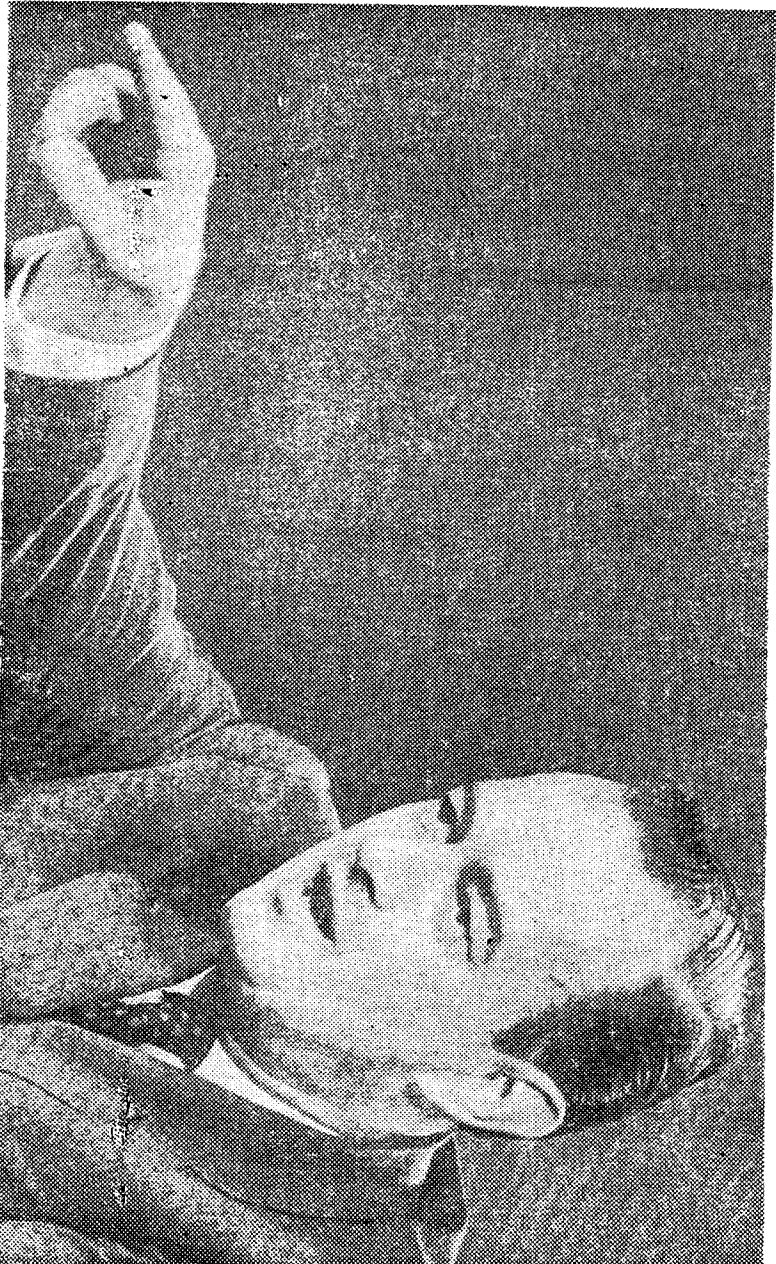
Aides . . .

am very sympathetic to President Johnson, who I believe behaved admirably at a time when the rest of us were just barely able to function."

COULD BE WRONG

Manchester also said it was possible that eyewitnesses could be mistaken in telling him that no aides to President Kennedy were present at Johnson's swearing-in in Dallas after President Kennedy's assassination. He said it would be "presumptuous for a contemporary historian . . . to claim that he bats a thousand."

He also said Marina Oswald, wife of the alleged assassin Lee Harvey Oswald, gave testimony "full of contradictions" before the Warren Commission and "should have been questioned more sharply."



William Manchester gestures as he answers questions on a television interview in Washington

... But Praises Bobby and Jackie

Here are highlights of NBC television's "Meet the Press" interview of William Manchester, author of "The Death of a President":

ON MRS. JACQUELINE KENNEDY—"She was disturbed over serialization, which she felt would be commercialization . . . within hours literally of a trial. Mrs. Kennedy did sit up until 5:30 in the morning reading the manuscript with . . . 'growing interest and fascination' . . . Mrs. Kennedy's suggestions were wise and understandable . . ."

ON SEN. ROBERT F. KENNEDY—"I remember that among other things he said that he didn't want anyone to make

a killing, a financial killing out of his brother's death . . . I think Sen. Kennedy has a strong and admirable sense of family loyalty, and when he learned that Mrs. Kennedy was distressed, he then tried to find another solution . . ."

ON PRESIDENT JOHNSON—"Of course, the charge has been made that the book is hostile to President Johnson and I resent this. It is not true. I think when the book is read, people will realize that I was and still am very sympathetic to President Johnson, who I believe behaved admirably at a time when the rest of us were just barely able to function . . ."

ON MARINA OSWALD—"I'd say that of all the witnesses before the (Warren) Commission, the testimony of Marina Oswald is the one which is full of contradiction . . . And there was a good deal . . . great feeling among the staff and the Commission she should have been questioned more sharply. Marina Oswald, of the people involved in this catastrophe, was the one person who declined to see me."

ON HIS BOOK—"I believe the integrity of the book has been preserved . . . I am confident that when the book appears, it will stand on its own and the controversy will recede into the past."