

THIS WEEK'S INAUGURATION RECALLS 30 SECONDS OF HISTORY

by FRED BLUMENTHAL

At noon next Wednesday, when President Lyndon Baines Johnson places his left hand on the Bible and raises his right hand to repeat the brief, solemn oath of office, the camera eyes of the world will be upon him.

But when President Johnson took his first Presidential oath on that tragic November day in Dallas, Tex., he was in the cramped quarters of Air Force One, the Presidential plane. Only a handful of people were present—and there was only one lens and one microphone to capture one of the most dramatic moments in American history.

That camera was in the steady hands of 44-year-old U. S. Army Signal Corps Captain Cecil Stoughton, official White House photographer since January 1961. It was the biggest test of Stoughton's long career as a photographer.

Like many others in the Presidential motorcade, Stoughton had found himself at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, knowing that something terrible had happened, but not that John F. Kennedy had been murdered.

"I was standing in a corridor when Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, with grave expressions, rushed past me," Stoughton recalls, "I asked a White House colleague, 'Where is the Vice-President going in such a hurry?' He answered, stressing the words heavily, 'The President and Mrs. Johnson are going to Washington on Air Force One.' That was when I first learned that John F. Kennedy was dead.

"Though numb with shock and horror, I knew I now had only one duty—to stay near President Johnson and be available for any assignment. I hitched a ride to Love Field.

"Assistant White House Press Secretary Malcolm Kilduff came up to me and whispered, 'Thank God you're here. Mr. Johnson will be sworn in right here on the plane in a few minutes. You will be the only photographer. Is there a recording technician from the Signal Corps available to record the ceremony?' I replied, 'No, but there is a dictating machine on

the President's desk right over there. That's the best we can do.'

"When the ceremony was due to start, I wrestled with a tough decision. Naturally I wanted to use color film, but I knew that the whole world would be waiting for pictures of a swearing in, probably the most unique in American history. I settled for black and white. I felt that color would have taken too long to process.

"In the space of a few seconds, there flashed through my mind everything that can go wrong with a camera, even the best of them. (I was using a Hasselblad-500C, with 50-mm lens, an electronic flash and high-speed film.)

"Half a minute later, at 2:40 P.M., it was all over. I found myself drenched in sweat and trembling with tension.

HOPES FOR THE BEST

"I had been able to make only three shots. Kilduff thrust the tape into my hand and said, 'Cecil, get going. You know what to do.'

"I was the first person off the plane, and the last words I heard from the cabin were those of President Johnson: 'Let's get this plane moving to Washington.'

"As I raced into Dallas, the awesome thought struck me: I was carrying the only permanent records—both audio and visual—of the historic ceremony. And I was the only person in the world, outside of that small cabin, who knew that a new President of the United States had been sworn into office.

"The rest was purely mechanical. Luckily my pictures had come out well, and the tape recorder had been faithful to Mr. Kilduff. Within minutes both were going out over the world's news networks."

A measure of the skill and speed with which Captain Stoughton did his job is that LBJ while still winging his way to Washington had the unique experience of seeing his own swearing in picture on the television set in Air Force One.



Cameraman Stoughton had less than a minute to snap Pres. Johnson's swearing in.