

KENNEDY—by Sorensen

CHAPTER 1

By THEODORE C. SORENSEN

John Fitzgerald Kennedy had no fear or premonition of dying.

Having narrowly survived death in the war and in the hospital, having tragically suffered the death of a brother and a sister, having been told as a young man that his adrenal deficiency might well cut short his years, he did not need to be reminded that the life he loved was a precious, impermanent gift, not to be wasted for a moment.

John Kennedy could speak of death like all other subjects, candidly, objectively and at times humorously. The possibility of his own assassination he regarded as simply one more way in which his plans for the future might be thwarted. Yet he rarely mentioned death in a personal way and, to my knowledge, never spoke seriously about his own, once he recovered his health.

He had no morbid fascination with the subject of death. When his wife and daughter stopped by his White House desk with a dead bird Caroline wanted to bury, he preferred not to look at it. (Dead animals, in fact, appalled him. He did not like to hunt, was upset about the deer he had shot at the Johnson ranch in Texas, and often dangerously swerved his car to avoid running over a rabbit or dog, alive or dead, in the middle of the road.)

He mentioned more than once—but almost in passing—that no absolute protection was possible, that a determined assassin could always find a way, and that a sniper from a high window or rooftop seemed to him the least preventable.

His trip to Texas in November of 1963, like his mission in life, was a journey of reconciliation—to harmonize the warring factions of Texas Democrats, to dispel the myths of the right wing in one of its strongest citadels, and to broaden the base for his own re-election in 1964.

Just before he boarded his helicopter on the White House

This is the first of 20 articles by Mr. Sorensen, who as special counsel to the President was closer to John F. Kennedy than any other official. They are taken from his book, soon to be published.

South Lawn—Nov. 21, 1963, 10:45 a.m.—I ran out with some suggestions he had requested for "Texas humor." I never saw him again.

I must ask to be excused from repeating the details of that tragedy. How and why it happened are of little consequence compared to what it stopped.

He would not have condemned the entire city of Dallas. Certainly the warmth of its welcome that day was genuine and impressive.

He would not have condemned the Dallas police, the FBI and the Secret Service. Certainly there were limitations on their ability to guard an active, strong-willed President in a free society.

He would not, finally, have doubted the conclusions of guilt pronounced by the Warren Commission. In the Commission's own words, "because of the difficulty of proving negatives to a certainty, the possibility of others being involved . . . cannot be established categorically"; and thus we can never be absolutely certain whether some other hand might not have coached, coaxed or coerced the hand of President Kennedy's killer.

Personally I accept the conclusion that no plot or political motive was involved, despite the fact that this makes the deed all the more difficult to accept.

Jack Kennedy was living at his peak. Almost everything seemed to be moving in his direction—abroad after the Cuban missile crisis and Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, at home with the tax and civil rights bills, in office with a more complete mastery of the executive branch. He was healthier

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and happier than he had ever been.

On his last full day in Washington, Nov. 20, at breakfast with the legislative leaders, he had reviewed progress on the tax, civil rights and education bills, and spoken out strongly against attempts to curb his foreign aid funds and wheat sales to the Soviet Union.

The controversial nature of his program did not seem to have dimmed the enthusiasm of his reception (in Dallas)—and Dallas had voted more strongly against Kennedy in 1960 than any other big city.

Perhaps that encouraged him to think, as he rode through the streets, about his new proposals for 1964. Foremost among the new items was a comprehensive, coordinated attack on poverty.

More likely he was thinking of 1964 in terms of the campaign, for this was a barely disguised campaign trip.

He had already flatly committed himself to a restaging of the televised debates with his opponent and was looking forward to them.

He cautioned us not to talk to the press regarding prospective Republican nominees, fearful that our indication of a favorite might encourage the Republicans to turn elsewhere. Within the confines of the White House he predicted—and fervently hoped—that Barry Goldwater would be nominated.

For Nelson A. Rockefeller to be named, he said, "would be too good to be true — but he doesn't have a chance." George Romney or some dark horse, he felt, had a chance and would be tougher to beat than Goldwater, whom he liked personally but who stood diametrically opposed to him on every major issue.

Looked Forward To 1964 Campaign

"This campaign," said the President with relish, "may be among the most interesting as well as pleasurable campaigns that have taken place in a long time." Defeating Goldwater, he thought, would halt the growth of the radical right and provide him with a renewed and more powerful mandate.

He expected his second term, like that of Theodore Roosevelt, to be more productive of domestic legislation than the first, with a more responsive, responsible Congress and a less distracting, distressing foreign scene.

He did not deliberately defer controversial proposals until that term — with the exception of a few in need of more study, such as new patent and pension fund regulations, new tax treatment for foundations and the adoption of the metric system of measurement.

But he believed that the second term would see far-reaching breakthroughs to meet the modern problems of automation, transportation, urbanization, cultural opportunity and economic growth.

He anticipated that an increased

The Author

Ted Sorensen was 24 when he joined the staff of 35-year-old Sen. John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts in 1953 as administrative assistant.

A Unitarian from a middle-income family in Lincoln, Neb., and holder of a law degree from the University of Nebraska, he had little in common with his new boss in terms of background and experience.

Yet in the 11 years that followed he became almost a part of Kennedy—in some respects he was in fact the "alter ego" some called him.

Sorensen knew the senator, the candidate, the President as no one else knew him throughout his entire political life. Appointed special counsel to the President after Kennedy's election in 1960, he was on the inside of every decision and every crisis.



stabilization of the arms race and an easing of East-West tensions would enable him to devote a larger share of expenditure increases to domestic and particularly urban needs.

Even more important were his long-range goals in foreign affairs — a decade of development to put the poorer nations on their feet, an Atlantic partnership with Western Europe as an equal and increasingly more intimate partner, a United Nations made stronger as national sovereignty became weaker and, most importantly, an evolving detente with the Soviet Union and the eventual reunification of Europe.

He had learned so much from the first and second Cuban crises, from his travels and talks with foreign leaders, from his successes and failures. He knew better than he had even a year earlier how to stay out of traps, how not to antagonize generals, and how to stay on top of international nuclear politics.

New arms limitations, new science and space cooperation, new approaches on Berlin, and increased trade and contacts with Eastern Europe were all on the future agenda. And the one major foreign policy issue deliberately postponed to the second term was Red China.

After the second term . . . well, I do not believe he was thinking about that in Dallas that day. I do not believe he thought about it much at all.

I have an idea he would have

groomed his own successor as Democratic standard-bearer, but I have no idea whom he would have picked, and I don't think he did either.

He would have remained active and influential in the party — ex-presidents, he said, in some ways have more influence than they did when they were presidents.

He would have written his memoirs. He would have spent time at his library.

But none of these outlets would have been sufficient for a man of his exceptional energies at the age of 51.

He might have purchased, published or edited a newspaper, as he once contemplated when still in the Senate, or become a syndicated columnist. He might have been secretary of State in some subsequent Democratic administration.

He might have been president of a university. When I told him that McGeorge Bundy had been mentioned as a possible new president of Yale (but said he wasn't interested), Kennedy dead-panned: "I wish somebody would offer me the presidency of Yale!"

Return to Senate Was a Possibility

Necessarily on the list of possibilities was a return to his first love, the Senate. His wife, remembering his contentment in that body, once asked Ted Kennedy at dinner whether he would give back Jack's seat when the time came, and Teddy loyally said that of course he would. But the President was upset, and sternly told Jacqueline later never to do that to Teddy and not to worry about his future.

On Nov. 22 his future merged with his past, and we will never know what might have been.

His own inner drive, as well as the swift pace of our times, had enabled him to do more in the White House in three years than many had done in eight—to live a fuller life in 46 years than most men do in 80. But that only makes all the greater our loss of the years he was denied.

How, then, will history judge him? It is too early to say. I am too close to say. But history will surely record that his achievements exceeded his years.

In less than three years he presided over a new era in American-Soviet relations, a new era in American-Soviet relations, a new era in our Latin American relations, a new era in fiscal and economic policy and a new era in space exploration.

His presidency helped launch the longest and strongest period of economic expansion in our peacetime history, the largest and swiftest buildup of our defensive strength in peacetime history, and new and enlarged roles for the federal government in higher education, mental affliction, civil rights and the conservation of human and natural resources.

Some moves were dramatic, such as the Cuban missile crisis and the Test Ban Treaty and the Peace Corps and the Alliance for Progress.

Some were small day-by-day efforts on Berlin or Southeast Asia, where no

real progress could be claimed, or on school dropouts or national parks.

Some were simply holding our own—no nation slipped into the Communist orbit, no nuclear war raised havoc on our planet, no new recession set back our economy.

But generally Kennedy was not content to hold his own. His efforts were devoted to turning the country around, starting it in new directions, getting it moving again.

"He believed," said his wife, "that one man can make a difference and that every man should try."

He left the nation a whole new set of basic premises—on freedom now instead of someday for the American Negro, on dampening down instead of "winning" the cold war, on the unthink-

He stood for excellence in an era of indifference, for hope in an era of doubt, for placing public service ahead of private interests, for reconciliation between East and West, black and white, labor and management. He had confidence in man and gave men confidence in the future.

It will not be easy for historians to compare John Kennedy with his predecessors and successors, for he was unique in his imprint upon the office:

The first from the Catholic faith.

The first to be elected at so young an age.

The first to take office in an age of mutual nuclear capabilities.

The first to reach literally for the moon and beyond.

ability instead of the inevitability of nuclear war, on cutting taxes in times of deficit, on battling poverty in times of prosperity.

For the most part, on Nov. 22, these problems had not been solved and these projects had not been completed. Even most of those completed will impress historians a generation from now only if this generation makes the most of them.

But I suspect that history will remember John Kennedy for what he started as well as for what he completed. The forces he released in this world will be felt for generations to come.

People will remember not only what he did but what he stood for—and this, too, may help the historians assess his presidency.

The first to prevent a new recession or inflation in modern peacetime.

The first to pronounce that all racial segregation and discrimination must be abolished as a matter of right.

The first to meet our adversaries in a potentially nuclear confrontation.

The first to take a solid step toward nuclear arms control.

And the first to die at so young an age.

Pulitzer Prize And the Presidency

In battle he became a hero. In literature he won a Pulitzer Prize. In politics he reached the presidency.

His inaugural, his wife, his children, his policies, his conduct of crises, all reflected his pursuit of excellence.

History and posterity must decide. Customarily they reserve the mantle of greatness for those who win great wars, not those who prevent them.

But in my unobjective view I think it will be difficult to measure John Kennedy by any ordinary historical yardstick. For he was an extraordinary man, an extraordinary politician and an extraordinary President.

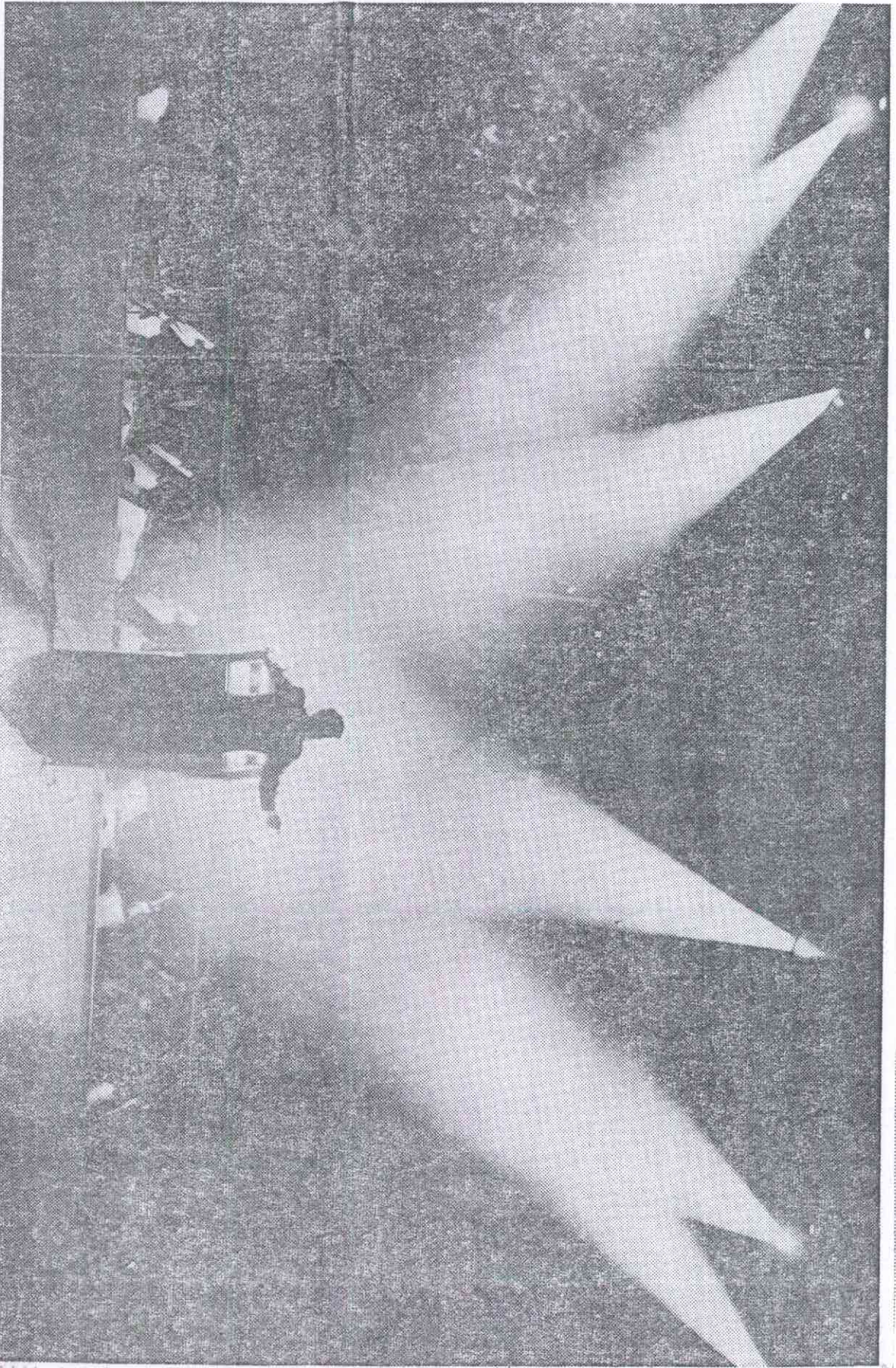
Just as no chart on the history of weapons could accurately reflect the advent of the atom, so it is my belief that no scale of good and bad presidents can rate John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Without demeaning any of the great men who have held the presidency in this century, I do not see how John Kennedy could be ranked below any one of them.

His life, not his death, created his greatness. In November, 1963, some saw it for the first time. Others realized that they had too casually accepted it. Others mourned that they had not previously admitted it to themselves.

But the greatness was there, and it may well loom even larger as the passage of years lends perspective.

One of the doctors at the Parkland Hospital in Dallas, observing John Kennedy's six-foot frame on the operating table, was later heard to remark: "I had never seen the President before. He was a big man, bigger than I thought."

He was a big man—much bigger than anyone thought—and all of us are better for having lived in the days of Kennedy.



'He was an extraordinary man, an extraordinary politician and an extraordinary President.'

—Star Staff Photo by Tom Hoy

A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

This book is not a neutral account. An impassioned participant cannot be an objective observer.

Having formed a strong attachment for John Kennedy, I cannot now pretend an attitude of complete detachment. Having devoted nearly 11 years to advancing his interests and explaining his views, I cannot now cloak my partisanship as disinterested scholarship.

This book, let it be clear at the outset, praises John Kennedy and what he has done, not merely out of loyalty and affection, but out of deep pride and conviction.

Nevertheless he both deserves and would have desired something better than a portrait that painted him as more herculean than human. In life he did not want his counsel to be a courtier, and in death he would not want his biography confined to eulogies.

Making no claims of omniscience or infallibility, he freely admitted imperfections and ignorance in many areas. He credited luck with many of his achievements.

This book does not purport to be a full-scale biography of John Kennedy or a comprehensive history of his era. Yet it is more than a personal memoir.

I have attempted to put into context and perspective my observations and association with an extraordinary man during an extraordinary period,

relying primarily on what I know rather than on what others have written.

I have not interviewed those whose memories may have been shaded by subsequent events, but have depended principally on my files and recollections—for which there can be no footnotes.

As a result, in addition to certain facts omitted for reasons of security or propriety, those episodes in John Kennedy's life in which I did not participate—including all that took place before 1953 and many thereafter—are not reported here in intimate detail.

I do not claim that those included were necessarily the most important, only that none has been deliberately excluded and that the real John Kennedy can be more clearly sketched through first-hand recollections.

This is a book, moreover, about one man—not his family, his friends or his foes, not Washington or the world he inhabited, and those in search or need of further facts on these subjects will find them here only as they pertain to John Kennedy.

If some passages seem politically partisan, it is because he was a Democrat and proud of it. My purpose is neither to condemn nor condone the actions of others, nor to substitute my judgment for my

subject's. My only obligation is to the truth about Kennedy.

Historical truths, to be sure, are rarely the object of unanimity. Recollections differ, opinions differ, even the same facts appear different to different people.

John Kennedy's own role will be recalled in wholly different fashion, I am certain, by those in different relationships with him. To the politicians, he was first and last a politician. To the intellectuals, his qualities of mind were most memorable. Differing traits and trade-marks are recalled by his friends and by his family.

Most regrettable, in my view, are those memorials and tributes which speak more of his style than of his substance. The Kennedy style was special—the grace, the wit, the elegance, the youthful looks will rightly long be remembered.

But what mattered most to him, and what in my opinion will matter most to history, was the substance—the strength of his ideas and ideals, his courage and judgment. These were the pith and purpose of his presidency, of which style was but an overtone.

I would be the last to diminish the value of his speeches. But their significance lay not in the splendor of their rhetoric but in the principles and policies they conveyed.

Theodore C. Sorensen



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—AP Photo