

Review/Television

A Chat With David And Ben

By WALTER GOODMAN

The spirit of tonight's conversation on "Talking With David Frost," on PBS, between Mr. Frost and Benjamin C. Bradlee, the former executive editor of The Washington Post, is established at once. The two men are seated in facing armchairs in Mr. Bradlee's Georgetown house for a shirtsleeves, ties-loosened chat. Since this is Mr. Frost, who knows everybody, it's first-name time. Katharine Graham, the former publisher of the Post, is Kay; Alexander M. Haig Jr. is Al Haig. Speaking to Sally Quinn, who is married to Mr. Bradlee, Mr. Frost refers to her husband as Ben, and speaking to viewers, he calls her Sally. Hi, David.

Within a minute, the men are onto Watergate, but Mr. Bradlee is not about to give away the identity of Deep Throat, the anonymous source who fed information to Bob Woodward, the Post reporter who broke the Watergate story with Carl Bernstein. He says the press "eased off" after Watergate and has not been tough enough on Ronald Reagan or George Bush. He comes down particularly hard on the way the Pentagon controlled the news coverage of the Persian Gulf war, "the most sophisticated manipulation that ever was."

It's all very relaxed. Mr. Bradlee is nothing like Jason Robards, who played him as a tough newspaper type in "All the President's Men," the movie of the book by Mr. Bernstein and Mr. Woodward about Watergate. He is low-key, reflective and far from assertive; his responses are slowed by phrases like "I mean" and "you know." Maybe retirement has had a softening effect, or maybe it is the camera. When Mr. Frost presses him mildly on where newspapers should draw the line when it comes to the private doings of public figures, Mr. Bradlee becomes a touch defensive about the Post's coverage of Gary Hart's extracurricular affair that helped to end the former Colorado Senator's Presidential hopes in 1988.

Stroked along by his guest, Mr. Bradlee talks easily about his friendship with John F. Kennedy ("your dear friend, the President," Mr. Frost gushes, for the benefit of the audience) but says he didn't know anything about Kennedy's sex life. There is an elusive exchange that is likely to puzzle viewers who are not as in the

know as Mr. Frost about the relations between Kennedy and Mary Meyer, Mr. Bradlee's former sister-in-law.

In a brief appearance, Ms. Quinn tells Mr. Frost that her husband is "a really real softie" and speaks affectingly about their son, Quinn, who was born with a heart defect. Mr. Frost can't seem to leave well enough alone. After she tells of the boy's courage, he oozes, "And valiant, yes?" She replies, "Valiant, absolutely." A good hostess.

'The Men Who Killed Kennedy'

A&E

Tonight

"The Men Who Killed Kennedy," a five-part documentary that begins tonight, is as comprehensive an argument as television has offered for the conspiracy theories surrounding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Produced in England by

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Nigel Turner, it brings on witnesses, investigators and others who contend that official explanations of the how, why and who of the assassination have covered up the truth for more than a quarter of a century.

Evidence, some old, some new, is offered that throws doubt on the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole gunman. (In tonight's "Talking With David Frost," reviewed above, Ben Bradlee says he still believes the Warren Report.) As the title hints, "The Men Who Killed Kennedy" asserts that Oswald could not have done it alone — and in fact did not do it at all. The fatal shot, it maintains, came not from the Texas School Book Depository, but from the infamous grassy knoll along the Kennedy motorcade route in Dallas. Medical evidence is said to have been tampered with. Jack Ruby, who killed Oswald soon after his arrest, is reported to have consorted with Mafia figures who were out to get the President.

Mr. Turner proves better at gathering the evidence against the authorized version than in subjecting his findings to the sort of skepticism he applies to the Warren Commission, the F.B.I. and Congressional commit-

tees. His script, which refers to "a coup d'état," tends to substitute hyperbole for proof, as when Bill Kurtis, the narrator, speaks flatly of the "complex and sinister forces that murdered the President."

Suggestive as some of the material is, viewers will note that no American official directly involved in what must have been an extensive plot has ever blown a whistle, and that the conspiracy theorists are spared strenuous cross-examination. Jim Garrison, the former New Orleans district attorney whose efforts to bring a case to court failed, repeats his contention, based largely on surmise, that Oswald, whom he calls "totally, unequivocally, completely innocent," was set up by the C.I.A. (There seems to be a resurgence of Garrisonology. Oliver Stone is now making a movie that reportedly relies on his allegations.)

The Kennedy assassination, so filled with improbabilities and coincidences, refuses to rest quietly. Even if you come away unpersuaded that the murderers were three contract killers imported from Marseilles, you may find yourself wondering — which is more than you can say for most television shows.