

'MACHINE GUN FEAR' AFTER JFK'S DEATH

Pilots at Dallas 'Near Collapse'

By the Associated Press and United Press International

NEW YORK — The two pilots of Air Force 1 were on the verge of nervous collapse, fearing the plane at any moment would be raked by machine gun fire as they awaited take-off orders at Dallas after the assassination of President Kennedy.

William Manchester, in his book "The Death of a President," wrote:

The pilot, Col. James Swindel, "was near collapse. 'It became,' in his words, 'a struggle to continue.'"

His co-pilot (Lt. Col. Lewis Hanson) "was, if anything, in worse shape . . . at any moment, he had expected the fuselage to be raked by machine gun fire."

7 MILES UP

Swindel took the plane up seven miles — two miles higher than the Presidential jet ever had gone. Manchester said Swindel actually wondered whether he could make it to Andrews, their Air Force base destination outside Washington.

Back in the plane, said Manchester in Look Magazine's third installment of the book, there were scenes of near-hysteria, tears and swelling animosity between Kennedy's aides and the adherents of the new President, Lyndon B. Johnson.

"I have only one President, and he's lying back in that cabin," Manchester attributes those anguished words to Brig. Gen. Godfrey McHugh, Air Force aide to Kennedy.

OTHER REPORTS

Manchester also reported:

• Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy found Johnson on a bed, dictating, in the private cabin when she boarded the airplane.

"Because she regarded the bedroom as hers, she did not knock," Manchester wrote. "She simply grasped the latch and twisted it. Inside, reclining on the bed, was Lyndon Johnson, dictating to Marie Fehmer."

The author said Johnson and the secretary hastily left the cabin.

• After the swearing-in ceremony, Johnson and his wife asked Mrs. Kennedy to sit with them in a forward

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compartment on the plane. She excused herself, however, and hurried to the rear, to be near the coffin.

" . . . And she began to cry," Manchester wrote. "It was the first time she had wept; the tears came in a flood, and for a long time she couldn't speak."

• Johnson twice asked Kenneth O'Donnell and Lawrence O'Brien, aides to Kennedy, to sit with him. They refused.

Manchester says Gen. McHugh wanted to be sure the reporters aboard the plane knew about this and said to them — pounding the table — "I want the record to show that (Kennedy's four aides) spent this flight in the tail compartment with the President — President Kennedy."

• Mrs. Johnson, "ordinarily the essence of tact," inadvertently said to Mrs. Kennedy that what hurt her most was the fact that Kennedy had been killed in Texas. Manchester quoted her as saying later, "Immediately, saying later, 'Immediately, I regretted it.'"

He wrote, "This was no day for Texas chauvinism; Kennedy's death should be what wounded her most."

• Mrs. Kennedy "fiercely" rejected suggestions that she change from her blood-drenched dress to fresh

clothing before the plane landed in Washington. "No," she replied, "let them see the horror."

• Johnson invited all the passengers on the plane to join in the swearing-in ceremony. A wide-lens camera was used to photograph it.

Manchester wrote, "Despite the width of the Hasselblad lens, it did not record the presence of a single male Kennedy aide. The only Kennedy man there — Dr. (George) Burkley — stood behind someone else."

'AN AFFRONT'

Manchester added: "President Johnson did not deserve this. To a man of his hypersensitivity, such treatment was deeply wounding. More important, it was an affront to the Presidency. The coexistence of the two administrations in an oppressive airplane and the fact that most of these same individuals had battled one another three years earlier in Los Angeles, made tempest inevitable here."

Manchester pictured O'Donnell as pacing up and down a corridor, pressing his hands against his ears as though to blot out the sound of the oath-taking.

However, when O'Donnell testified before the Warren Commission, he was asked, "Were you present when President Johnson was sworn in?" O'Donnell replied, "I was."

• A man, never identified, made off with two objects used in the ceremony — Kennedy's personal Bible and a card on which the oath of office had been typed.

Manchester said the man stopped Judge Sarah Hughes, who swore in Johnson, as she was leaving the plane, and asked her if she wanted them. Manchester wrote, "...

She surrendered them, assuming he was some sort of security man. He wasn't." The two items have never been traced.

2 KEY INCIDENTS

The taut, supercharged atmosphere on the plane developed out of two incidents before it took off for Washington.

The first took place at Parkland Hospital when Dallas authorities informed the Kennedy aides that the law stipulated an autopsy must

be performed before his body could be removed.

Mrs. Kennedy had adamantly refused to leave the hospital so long as Kennedy's body remained there. She had begged to be permitted a last look before the casket was closed and, according to Manchester, kissed his lips and slipped her wedding ring on his finger.

Then, as time passed, she was saying, "Why can't I get my husband back to Washington?"

GROTESQUE ENCOUNTER

Manchester disclosed Mrs. Kennedy's grotesque hospital encounter with a distracted Catholic priest, Rev. Thomas Cain of the University of Dallas, who brandished a relic of the "true cross" over Kennedy's body. He put his arms around her and called her Jackie and "endearing" names until Mrs. Kennedy told him to leave her alone.

O'Brien and O'Donnell envisioned a delay of hours, or perhaps even a day, before the autopsy could be completed. They were determined to spare her the ordeal of a long wait.

A furious dispute erupted. Manchester wrote that a Dallas policeman present was "fingering his pistol."

All accounts of the melee — it became a shoving match — are confused. But O'Donnell and O'Brien both testified before the Warren Commission that they heard someone say, "This is just another homicide."

TRIGGERS CLIMAX

That triggered the climax. O'Donnell told the commission he determined then to remove the body immediately. He notified the Secret Service and the Kennedy aides to be prepared to leave. His testimony reads:

"We pushed the casket out through the hall. This first gentleman who, I presume, was from the coroner's office, shouted very loudly, 'You can't do that, you can't leave here now.' Nobody paid any attention to him . . .

"It was most disconcerting because we were concerned at all times that at some moment they would say 'stop' and I hated to think what might happen to Mrs. Kennedy if she had to go back and go through this all over again. So we brushed them all aside. . . ."

O'Brien, describing the



GODFREY McHUGH
"Only one president"



JAMES SWINDEL
Near collapse?



LEWIS HANSON
Expected gunfire

same melee as they pushed the coffin down the corridor, told the commission:

"My recollection is that objections were still being raised by some or all the offi-

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cials. My recollection also is that we paid little heed to it."

CLASHES ON PLANE

Thus, grieving and shocked by the assassination, and with their emotions further aroused by the angry incident at the hospital, the Kennedy party brought the president's body to Love Field, where the presidential and vice presidential planes were waiting.

Johnson and his party had preceded them. The Vice President had telephoned Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in Washington about being sworn in as President immediately, before returning to the capital.

Exactly what passed between them still is not clear.

Under date of July 10, 1964, the President gave the Warren Commission a statement which said, referring to his telephone conversations with Washington:

"As I remember, our conversation was interrupted to allow the Attorney General to come back on the line. He said the oath should be administered to me immediately, before taking off for Washington, and that it should be administered by a judicial officer of the United States. Shortly thereafter, the Deputy Attorney General, Mr. (Nicholas) Katzenbach, dictated the form of oath to one of the secretaries aboard the plane."

'MISUNDERSTANDING'

Manchester wrote that when Mrs. Kennedy met her

brother-in-law at the end of the flight, she quoted Johnson as saying, that you'd said he had to be sworn in right there in Dallas. The author continued:

"The Attorney General was startled. There must be some misunderstanding, he said; he had made no such suggestion."

Manchester wrote that he "invited" Johnson to comment on this "misapprehension." He said the President replied he had nothing to add to his statement to the Warren Commission.

Having determined to be sworn in aboard the airplane, Johnson sent for his friend, Judge Sarah Hughes. Some time elapsed before she could be found and could start for Love Field.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Kennedy and her aides were anxious to leave at once for Washington. They were unaware that Johnson was waiting for the ceremony to be performed. Some were not even aware he was on the plane.

COUNTER-ORDERS

McHugh went forward and told the pilot to take off. Kilduff countermanded the order. This happened several times.

Manchester wrote that Kilduff and McHugh finally encountered each other in the corridor. McHugh said he wanted the plane off the ground immediately and Kilduff said it could not leave until Johnson had been sworn in, the author reported.

He wrote that McHugh told Kilduff that Johnson was aboard the vice presidential plane, not Air Force I. Manchester quoted Kilduff as replying, "then you go back and tell that six-foot Texan he isn't Lyndon Johnson. We're not going . . . until the

President has been sworn in."

It was at this point, Manchester wrote, that McHugh retorted that he had "only one President."

McHugh, the book continues, asked why the ceremony could not be performed while the plane was in the air. Instead of receiving an answer to this question, Manchester wrote, there was a "maddening discussion" about lens angles and closeups.

'LYNDON' AND 'HONEY'

So the plane waited. Manchester wrote that Mrs. Kennedy was complaining about the heat in the rear compartment and asking why the flight did not leave. Finally, she learned that Johnson would take the oath of office on the ground. She said she understood.

The author wrote that Mrs. Kennedy addressed Johnson by his first name. Then she corrected herself, said she meant to say "Mr. President" and would never again call him "Lyndon." Manchester wrote that the President replied, "Honey, I hope you'll call me that for the rest of your life."

For McHugh's role in the events on the plane, Manchester said, ". . . Gen. McHugh had forfeited his hope for another star. Indeed, even his days in uniform were numbered."

RETIREES

McHugh retired from the Air Force within a few months of the assassination and became an executive with an electronics firm.

The book reports that Johnson asked both O'Brien and O'Donnell to remain on the White House staff. Manchester wrote that he told

them, "I need you more than you need me — and more than Kennedy needed you."

Mrs. Johnson summed up the terrible day in her "never-to-be-forgotten moments" notebook: "This is a moment that is altogether dreamlike, because the thing is so unreal; we're just like characters in a play; this is the beginning of something for us that's dreadful and heavy, and you don't know what it holds."